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Chaucer's Formal Histories: Temporality and Intertextuality from the Italian Trecento to "Troilus and Criseyde" and "The Canterbury Tales"

Kara Gaston

University of Pennsylvania, ksg1066@gmail.com

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Abstract

In a 2010 essay on the fate of New Historicism, Steven Justice proposes that critics should rethink methods of contextualizing poetry within history. As Justice explains, New Historicism has lead critics to construct increasingly local, microscopic, discrete contexts for reading poetry. How, he asks, might we account for the moment in which poetry is written without isolating that context from larger processes of time and change? This dissertation argues that Chaucer's poetic form can itself point the way towards a dynamic understanding of the moment in which poetry is composed. Chaucer writes in a developing vernacular defined through its constant tendency to change. Meanwhile, he builds his works using borrowed material from old texts: sources both Latin and vernacular, classical and medieval. In order to understand the significance of this layered literary form, I compare Chaucer's poetry to the textual culture of Trecento Italy. There, the growing popularity of Roman history among vernacular readers inspired scribes and translators to develop sophisticated methods of using form to reflect historical, lexical, and cultural difference between past and present. Meanwhile, Trecento Italian poets recognized that the vernacular itself could provide an important site for theorizing historical alterity. As Dante argues, given enough time to develop, a vernacular language will appear completely foreign to its original speakers. Using Italian texts as comparative context for close readings of Chaucer's poetry, I find that Chaucer is also interested in how language and literature change over time. However, rather than focusing on the difference between ancient poetry and medieval texts, Chaucer hones in on the propensity for alterity within his own poetic form and lexicon, which is amplified by the influence of translated and adapted texts. His poetry represents its own moment as being in a state of transformation driven, in part, by the very act of writing.

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David Wallace

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Rita Copeland

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CHAUCER'S FORMAL HISTORIES: TEMPORALITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY FROM THE
ITALIAN *TRECENTO* TO *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE* AND *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

Kara Gaston

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Supervisor of Dissertation

David Wallace

Judith Rodin Professor of English

Co-Supervisor of Dissertation

Rita Copeland

Sheli Z. and Burton X. Rosenberg

Professor of Humanities

Graduate Group Chairperson

Paul Saint-Amour, Associate Professor of English

Dissertation Committee

Emily Steiner, Associate Professor of English

Kevin Brownlee, Professor of Romance Languages

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Kara Gaston

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ABSTRACT

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Rita Copeland

In a 2010 essay on the fate of New Historicism, Steven Justice proposes that critics should rethink methods of contextualizing poetry within history. As Justice explains, New Historicism has lead critics to construct increasingly local, microscopic, discrete contexts for reading poetry. How, he asks, might we account for the moment in which poetry is written without isolating that context from larger processes of time and change? This dissertation argues that Chaucer's poetic form can itself point the way towards a dynamic understanding of the moment in which poetry is composed. Chaucer writes in a developing vernacular defined through its constant tendency to change. Meanwhile, he builds his works using borrowed material from old texts: sources both Latin and vernacular, classical and medieval. In order to understand the significance of this layered literary form, I compare Chaucer's poetry to the textual culture of *Trecento* Italy. There, the growing popularity of Roman history among vernacular readers inspired scribes and translators to develop sophisticated methods of using form to reflect historical, lexical, and cultural difference between past and present. Meanwhile, *Trecento* Italian poets recognized that the vernacular itself could provide an important site for theorizing

historical alterity. As Dante argues, given enough time to develop, a vernacular language will appear completely foreign to its original speakers. Using Italian texts as comparative context for close readings of Chaucer's poetry, I find that Chaucer is also interested in how language and literature change over time. However, rather than focusing on the difference between ancient poetry and medieval texts, Chaucer hones in on the propensity for alterity within his own poetic form and lexicon, amplified by the influence of translated and adapted texts. His poetry represents its own moment as being in a state of transformation driven, in part, by the very act of writing.

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INTRODUCTION

And shal I pleyne—alas the harde stounde!—
Unto my foo that yaf myn herte a wounde
And yet desireth that myn harm be more?
Nay, certis, ferther wol I never founde
Non other helpe, my sores for to sounde.
My destine hath shapen hit so ful yore;
I wil non other medecyne ne lore;
I wil ben ay ther I was ones bounde.
That I have seid, be seid for evermore!

(*Anelida and Arcite* 238-46)¹

The complaint that concludes Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite* strives for self-consistency. Anelida, the abandoned woman who dictates these stanzas, refuses to alter her emotional state, remaining constantly faithful to her duplicitous lover, Arcite. Anelida's devotion to Arcite is also a devotion to her own linguistic past: she adheres to those things she has already uttered: "That I have seid, be seid for evermore." Her chiastic connection between what has been said and what will be said hinges upon the notion that her words will both retain their form over time and be interpreted consistently. This is a bold claim to make in the vernacular. English poetry is, as Chaucer notes in *Troilus and Criseyde*, threatened by "defaute of tongue," the geographical and temporal diversity of vernacular speech (*TC* V.1794). And although Anelida focuses only on her own, personal fidelity, she describes it in terms ("evermore") that evoke larger contexts. She absorbs a vast swath of time into the representation of her own constancy, enough time for her vernacular language to adapt and change, for her own language to become old and strange. Within the context of a changing vernacular, what kind of historicity might

¹ All citations of Chaucer's poetry are from Larry Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd Edition, (Boston, 1986).

attach itself to Anelida's words? How can subsequent readers access the moment in which she speaks and understand her language in its historical specificity?

In this dissertation, such questions motivate a turn to form. Form constitutes the space in which Dante, for example, grapples with the historicity of the vernacular *vis-à-vis* Latin. Anelida's desire to remain always as she was "ones bounde" recalls Dante's ambitions for vernacular poetics. In *Convivio*, Dante asserts that he will stabilize the changing Italian vernacular with the bond ("legame") of rhyme and meter (*Conv.* I.xiii.6).² This plan assumes that it is possible to use the demands of form to solidify the vernacular at a particular moment in its development, using rhyme and meter to bind together and hand down to later readers a vernacular that is simultaneously the product of a particular historical moment and continually fresh and useful. However, this very process threatens to erase the distinction between the vernacular and Latin. In both *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante celebrates the primacy and intimacy of the vernacular. It is a language that is near to us: "lo volgare è più prossimo quanto è più unito, [è quello è più unito] "che uno e solo è prima nella mente che alcuno altro" (*Conv.* I.xii.5). ("a man's vernacular is nearest to the extent that it is most closely related to him, for it is in his mind first and alone before any other.") The vernacular that Dante builds through poetry, however, is one learnt as a secondary language, through study. As critics including Albert Ascoli point out, such a language "is well on its way to becoming a

² All quotations of *Convivio* are from Franca Brambilla Ageno, ed., *Convivio* (Florence: Le Lettere 1995). Translations are from Richard H. Lansing, trans., *Convivio* (New York, 1990).

language of art and/or artifice.”³ In the context of *Anelida and Arcite*, such a concept of the vernacular interposes distance between the heroine and her own words. The very notion of binding the heroine’s language into a stable, poetic vernacular transforms what Anelida said “ones,” at a specific personal, emotional, and historical moment, into a different kind of language.

By the end of *Paradiso*, Dante not only abandons the notion of any stable language but also outlines a close relationship between linguistic change and historicity itself. In *Paradiso* 26, Adam explains that the language he once spoke in Paradise is now extinct, “e ciò conviene, / ché il uso d’i mortali è come fronda / in ramo, che sen va e altra vene” (26.136-38). (“And that is necessary, for the usage of mortals is like a leaf on the branch, which departs and another comes.”)⁴ All mortal things change; language is no different. The lexicon of *convenientia*—suitability—used in this passage recalls that which Dante uses for the idealized noble vernacular in *De vulgari eloquentia*. *De vulgari* argues that the illustrious vernacular ought only to be used by those worthy individuals whom it suits (*convenit*): people like Dante himself (*DVE* II.i.1-10).⁵ A different kind of suitability is at stake in *Paradiso*. As Adam argues, all mortal things change. The vernacular is therefore particularly suited to describing our condition because of its propensity to transform itself. Such a conception of language undermines the notion of

³ Albert Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge, 2008). See also Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Linguistica e retorica di Dante* (Pisa, 1978). See Maria Corti, *Dante a un nuovo crocevia* (Florence, 1981) for a proposed resolution to this problem, which Ascoli refutes.

⁴ Text and translation of the *Commedia* from Robert M. Durling, trans., *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (Oxford, 2011).

⁵ Pio Rajna, ed., *De vulgari eloquentia* (Florence, 1960).

preserving a particular moment in linguistic history not only because language inevitably changes, but also because human history itself is defined, not as discrete moments, but as a state of constant change. The vernacular expresses the state of being within time precisely because of its inherent instability.

Vernacular change thus offers the abstract possibility of insight into historicity. But what are the specific ways in which poetic form reflects a literary historical moment that is constantly in flux? Various critical efforts have been made to understand how Chaucer changed vernacular poetry. As the ostensible father of English literature, Chaucer has been credited with transforming English on the broadest scale. Christopher Cannon critiques such claims in his study of Chaucer's actual lexical innovation, arguing that the poet's actual contributions to the language were limited.⁶ In a related vein, it has been suggested that Chaucer's encounter with Italian poetry transformed his understanding, and subsequent understandings, of the expressive capacity of English literature.⁷ Yet neither of these approaches directly addresses the forms that a poem might actually use to attach poetry to a literary historical moment—or more precisely to the change within every moment. In order to understand such forms, this dissertation draws on the copious *Duecento* and *Trecento* Italian tradition of *volgarizzamento*, or vernacular translation. As Chapters One and Two discuss in detail, many Italian vernacular

⁶ Christopher Cannon, *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words* (Cambridge, U.K., 1998).

⁷ Important examples of this argument include Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, WI, 1991); Karla Taylor, Chaucer Reads "The Divine Comedy" (Stanford, 1989); Piero Boitani, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame* (Cambridge, U.K. 1984). On Chaucer's specific metrical debt to Italian poetry, cf. David Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1985).

translators attempted to carry over aspects of the formal and lexical specificity of their sources texts.⁸ A prose translation, for example, might be laid out on the page as verse in imitation of its poetic source text. The result is a vernacular continually altered by its contact with older texts, language twisted by encounters with the literary historical past such that it appears to constantly be becoming different from itself. From this perspective, I aim to analyze the *form* literary history takes within Chaucer's poetry: the contingent pressures of older texts upon new poetry; the unexpected lexicon and prosody generated in the process of grappling with diverse source texts and informing ideas.⁹

Anelida and Arcite provides a starting point for this discussion because it is a poem that cannot stay true to itself.¹⁰ Every effort that the poem makes to solidify and commemorate its account of Thebes exposes the failure of these ambitions. In its efforts to return a half-forgotten story to memory, it invokes the muses as singing with "vois memorial in the shade, / under the laurer which that may not fade" (*Anel* 18-19). And yet,

⁸ Cf. Alison Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature* (Cambridge, 2011), 44-69. I refer to this discussion and Cornish's sources in more detail in subsequent chapters.

⁹ Cf. Christopher Cannon, "Form," in Paul Strohm, ed., *Middle English* (Oxford, 2007), 177-190. Cannon argues that we might think of form as the "informing of raw materials according to the script of some idea" (77). I propose that such ideas are, in many of Chaucer's poems, multiple.

¹⁰ A significant part of the short critical bibliography on *Anelida* is dedicated to figuring out the intended form of the poem. Cf. Michael Cherniss, "Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite*: Some Conjectures," *Chaucer Review* 5 (1970): 9-21, which argues that the poem was intended to be a dream vision, and James Wimsatt, "*Anelida and Arcite*: A Narrative of Complaint and Comfort" *Chaucer Review* 5 (1970): 1-8 on its relationship to dream visions. Cf. John Norton Smith, "Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite*" in *Medieval Studies for J. A. W. Bennett* (Oxford, 1981) for the argument that the poem is complete, its final stanza spurious. Finally, see especially A. S. G. Edwards, "The Unity and Authenticity of *Anelida and Arcite*: The Evidence of the Manuscripts," *Studies in Bibliography* 41 (1988) on the poem's tendency to circulate as fragments. Edwards posits that our modern reconstruction of the poem may be faulty.

in the very process of incorporating source material into itself, the poem transforms into a depiction of loss and forgetting. Chaucer takes much of his material from Boccaccio's *Teseida*, including an arresting stanza that describes the death of the Seven Against Thebes:

For when Amphiorax and Tydeus,
Ipomedon, Parthenope also
Were ded, and slayn proude Campaneus,
And when the wrecched Thebans, bretheren two,
Were slayn, and kyng Adrastus hom ago,
So desolat stod Thebes and so bare
That no wight coude remedie of his fare.
(*Anel* 57-63)

Chaucer translates this stanza from a corresponding passage in *Teseida* Two, which reads,

perciò che, dopo Anfiorao, Tideo
stato era ucciso, e 'l buon Ippomedone,
e similmente il bel Partenopeo,
e più Teban, de' qua' non fo menzione,
innanzi e dopo al fiero Campaneo;
e dietro a tutti, in doloroso agone,
Etiole e Polinice, ferito,
morti, e Adrasto ad Argo era fuggito;

onde 'l misero regno era rimaso
voto di gente e pien d'ogni dolore [. . .]
(*Teseida* II.11-12)¹¹

Thus, after Amphiaraus, Tydeus was killed, and good Hippomedon, and handsome Parthenopaeus as well, and other Thebans whom I will not name before or after proud Campaneus. And last of all, Eteocles and the stricken Polynices died in grievous agony, while Adrastus fled to Argos.

For this the unhappy realm was left emptied of its people and filled with every sorrow.¹²

¹¹ Vittore Branca, ed., *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Milan, 1976).

Readings of such translations often focus on how Chaucer changes his source text; how he adjusts it to reflect his distinct poetic purpose. However, I want to start by considering instead how the encounter with Boccaccio's poetry proves disruptive, muddling the poetic purpose described in *Anelida's* opening stanza. Chaucer carries over several of the Italian stanza's formal features. The adverb "similmente" is translated as "also" and placed at the ending of a line. A relatively incidental term in the Italian thus anchors half of the English stanza's rhyme scheme. More significantly, Chaucer twice imitates Boccaccio's use of enjambment to describe death. In the Italian and the English, the anticlimactic movement from exotic Greek names and elaborate description to "stato era ucciso" and "morti" suggests the leveling effect of death. Chaucer retains this formal effect, enjambling "were ded" and "were slayn" at the beginning of lines. Exotic names hang on line endings, only to have their meaning reduced to the fact of being dead. By incorporating these formal effects into English, Chaucer begins to undermine the poem's initial work of commemoration. Adding material to the poem creates a new effect, that of loss.

What appears to be true for Chaucer's poetic form also emerges in *Anelida's* emotional content. Paradoxically, fidelity to the past, whether to an older text or a former lover, has the potential to effect transformation upon the faithful. As *Anelida* laments, her constancy to an inconstant object becomes her punishment:

So thirleth with the poynt of remembraunce
The swerd of sorwe, ywhet with fals plesaunce,

¹² Bernadette McCoy, trans., *The Book of Theseus: Teseida della Nozze d'Emilia* (New York, 1974).

Myn herte, bare of blis and blak of hewe,
That turned is in quakyng al my daunce,
My surete in awhaped countenaunce,
Sith hit availeth not for to ben trewe;
For whoso trewest is, hit shal her rewe
That serveth love and doth her observaunce
Alwey til oon, and chaungeth for no newe.

(*Anel* 211-19)

Precisely because of her unwavering love for Arcite, Anelida's joy is transformed to sorrow as he betrays her. Her inability to "chaungeth" for a new lover means that she must suffer the effects of all of Arcite's changefulness. The more tightly she clings to her devotion and her memory, the more she is subject to emotional upheaval. As a result, Anelida's testimony to her consistency becomes, in this stanza, an account of change: her dance has become "quakyng" and her certainty "awhaped countenaunce."

Formal fidelity and formal change are also at stake in these lines. Chaucer derives this passage's opening from Dante's *Purgatorio*. Walking over images of pride carved in the first terrace of Purgatory, Dante compares them to tombs with images of the dead carved on the floors of churches:

Come, perché di lor memoria sia,
sopra i sepolti le tombe terragne
portan segnato quel ch'elli eran pria,
onde li molte volte si ripiagne
per la puntura de la rimembranza,
che solo a' piè dà de le calcagne:
sì vid' io lì.

(*Purgatorio* XII.16-22)

As, over the buried dead, to preserve their memory, the tombs in a pavement are signed with what they were in life, so that often we weep again because of the pricking of memory, which drives its spurs only into the devoted: so I saw carvings there.

Depictions of the dead cause those who see them to relive the past and to weep again for the loss of loved ones. The more faithful one is to what has been lost, the more one feels its absence. (Or, perhaps, the greater one's faith, the more one recognizes that death awaits everyone.) Chaucer's translation imitates the sonic effects of Dante's "puntura della remembranza." In Chaucer's poem, too, the "poynt" of remembrance protrudes from the end of the line, its clear, memorable, articulation within the poem's meter a mimetic imitation of the clarity and pain of memory itself. But along with these sounds, Chaucer also takes from Dante a figurative language for describing memory. In translations such as *Boece*, Chaucer might gloss such a passage with a literal interpretation. But in *Anelida*, he uses it to develop a larger symbolic psychology of remembrance. Chaucer uses Dante's central image to create the image of a sword, made of (or perhaps wielded by) sorrow and sharpened with false pleasure. As it begins, the complaint thus moves outwards to the externalized psychology of the sword before returning to Anelida's plight. Dante's language shifts the poem's register as it enters into it, allowing the complaint to stage a rebeginning as it severs itself from the circumstances of Theban history and instead takes up emotional content.

In moments like this one, Chaucer's poetry might be described as taking on a layered historicity. On the one hand, it engages with the literary past as it is embodied by older texts. As Lee Patterson points out, this is a fraught form of historicity, for Chaucer's sources mediate the actual stuff of political history, and they themselves are often mediated by glosses and rewritings.¹³ On the other hand, Chaucer's poetry historicizes

¹³ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject*, 81.

itself in the sense that it recognizes its own propensity to change, in and through contact with literary history, even as it is being written. The act of rewriting does not simply involve layering a veneer of contemporary taste over an older text. Rather, it involves rupturing any stable literary moment that might be described as “contemporary,” creating cracks, fissures, and new possibilities within it.

The time of Chaucer’s literary form might therefore cast new light on critical efforts to reconceptualize historical context that have followed in the wake of New Historicism. New Historical attempts to get back to the grounds of textual production have often involved stripping away temporal and geographical abstractions of periodization and nationhood in an effort to return to the local.¹⁴ In recent years, responses to such scholarship have involved both rethinking the shape of time and returning attention to the shape of poetry. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen rearticulates diachronic connections by evoking epochal time in readings simultaneously scholarly, personal and experiential.¹⁵ Maura Nolan, meanwhile, directly addresses the kinds of apprehension required to think historically. She emphasizes that historical thought both relies on and takes place through forms. As she argues, “to embrace form is necessarily to engage history at its deepest level. To think through what a culture’s aesthetic production

¹⁴ Cf. the overview in Steven Justice, “Literary History,” in Susanna Fein and David Raybin, eds., *Chaucer: Contemporary Approaches* (University Park, PA, 2010), pp. 199-214. See also Frances Ferguson, “Romantic Studies,” in Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, eds., *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies* (New York, 1992): 100-123.

¹⁵ See for example Jeffery J. Cohen, “Time Out of Memory,” in Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico, eds., *The Post-Historical Middle Ages* (New York, 2009), 37-61.

actually does, from the inside and at close range, should be a primary objective.”¹⁶

Taking up the much-critiqued convention of the New Historicist anecdote, Nolan observes that scholarly historicism of all kinds is formal work: “a craft of reading and writing about texts.”¹⁷ As Nolan emphasizes, the interventions through which scholars discover the context, or the moment, of a given text are themselves a mode of composition.

What kind of historicism might we discover if we looked not only to our own methods of composition, but also to those of medieval poets? Simon Jarvis has recently emphasized that the space of composition is intimately historical, writing,

The point of historical formation and action in the poem, is always that of technique, because this is where the poem gets made, the point at which the voices of the many living and dead that are the poet’s repertoire or material are selected from, cut into, distorted, twisted, and precipitated into this or that composition—where their natural-historical antagonisms are exposed, concealed, exacerbated, or fudged.¹⁸

As Jarvis argues, poetic technique involves negotiation and adjudication between various sources and influences. The poet touches the past in the shape of its aesthetic forms, bringing them into conversation and confrontation. Yet there is a generative absence in Jarvis’s account of technique: the passage above is written in the passive voice, leaving the agent that brings the “voices of the many living and dead” together unidentified. Placing the poet or the new poem into the subject position would set limits on the encounters that Jarvis describes: the poet would ultimately be fully responsible for

¹⁶ Maura Nolan, “Historicism After Historicism,” in Scala and Federico, eds., *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, 63-85, at 83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Simon Jarvis, “For a Poetics of Verse,” *PMLA* 125 (2010): 931-35 at 931-32.

resolving the relationship between his sources and influences, conforming them to his moment. Chaucer himself is famously unwilling to claim such agency, insisting that “as myn auctour seyde, so sey I” (*TC* II.18). However disingenuous such narratorial claims may be, they leave space open for different kinds of formal agency to operate within the poem. Chaucer’s ambivalent representation of his own authorial control invites us to transform Jarvis’s words from the passive to the active voice: it is possible, in Chaucer’s poetry, to imagine source texts that “cut [. . .], distort[. . .], twist[. . .], and precipitate[. . .]” new compositions. Medievalists have the opportunity to study formal agency as it is evoked within manuscripts as well. Layout, glossing, and rubrication call our attention to the different kinds of intent and the different formal attributes that impress themselves, sometimes consistently and sometimes fleetingly, upon Chaucer’s poetry.¹⁹ The poems analyzed in this dissertation do not emerge from a single, still moment of composition. Instead, as Chaucer’s poems engage with the literary past their own poetics are, themselves, constantly shifted and changed via this engagement. The moment that Chaucer’s layered poetic form supplies for its reader is no moment at all; rather, it is the form of constant change that defines the sublunary world.

The constant transformation of Chaucer’s vernacular poetics is at the heart of Chapter One of this dissertation, which deals with Chaucer’s representation of linguistic, social, and poetic change in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chaucer inaugurates the second book of

¹⁹ Cf. Arthur Bahr and Alexandra Gillespie, “Medieval English Manuscripts: Form, Aesthetics, and the Literary Text,” *Chaucer Review* 47 (2013): 346-60, for the suggestion that aesthetics provide us with a means of engaging with the “impenetrable opacity” of material texts (351).

Troilus by admitting that the customs of the poem's ancient Trojan lovers might seem strange: as he explains, the behavior of lovers, like language itself, changes over the centuries. This passage, which probably derives from *Convivio*, imagines language as a yardstick of time, following Dante's argument that 1,000 years of linguistic change is enough to render the vernacular of one's own city strange and foreign. In order to understand how this difference manifests itself in a translation like *Troilus*, I read *Convivio* in the context of changes in Italian vernacular translation. Over the first half of the *Trecento*, translators became interested in emulating the syntax and lexicon of their Latin source texts over the course of the fourteenth century. Expanding the expressive range of the vernacular, these translations allow linguistic change to be glimpsed as it happens. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer exploits this space, using close translation to create effects of linguistic—and hence historical—difference within his own lexicon.

Even as Chaucer historicizes his own form, he explores its illusory potential to offer an escape from time and change. For the character Troilus, love, understood as a transcendent binding power, offers the possibility of concretizing his relationship with Criseyde. The formal embodiment of this binding force is Book Two, Meter Eight of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, which arranges both syntax and versification around the term *amor*. Chapter Two discusses Chaucer's translation of the Boethian text in *Troilus*, a process that was likely mediated by Chaucer's own *Boece*. Manuscript study suggests that readers of prose *Consolation* translations such as *Boece* in both England and Italy were attentive to impressions of Boethius's versification surviving in translation. Articulating these impressions of poetry on prose, scribes attempted to organize all-prose

translations as if they were still *prosimetra*. Such layout historicizes vernacular Boethius translation: it requires the reader to think across literary history and to understand the vernacular text's form in relation to the Latin source. Similar echoes of prosody structure Chaucer's translation of Book Two Meter Eight in *Troilus*. And here, too, these echoes of earlier versification historicize language. Even as the character Troilus appeals to the transcendent power of love for order and for guidance, Chaucer's poetry looks back within literary history, to Boethius's poetry, and finds its formal order there.

The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation turn from *Troilus and Criseyde* to *The Canterbury Tales*. Both chapters discuss form as a site that offers the possibility of transforming time—slowing it down or renewing it—and yet also belies those efforts. Chapter Three deals with *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, considering Chaucer's account of *gentillesse* alongside Italian efforts to reconcile ethical models of nobility with genealogical and nostalgic historicism. The chapter begins with Andrea Lancia's attempt to inscribe Trojan history into an exemplary model of historical reading, an effort complicated by the presence of Dante's language within Lancia's translation. Dante's poetry shifts attention away from the clear exposition of ancient deeds and towards the formal capacity of the Italian vernacular. Conversely, Boccaccio's *Decameron* presents the Florentine past as, itself, an object of desire—one lost in the years following the plague. The exemplary reading practice offered by theories of ethical nobility is poor comfort for such loss. *The Wife of Bath's Tale's* shares with these texts both nostalgia for the past and a desire for renewal and simplification. Form bears the traces of these desires and tests out the possibility of escaping the contingent world of history. Chaucer's poetics

appear to invite a reading practice free from the complications of context, only to reinscribe the poem within a network of places, poets, and texts.

Chapter Four deals with another kind of fantasy: Dorigen's efforts to regulate time in *The Franklin's Tale*. This chapter is unique in not discussing *volgarizzamento*. Instead, I focus on a vernacular translation within Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. Menedon's Question, the portion of the *Filocolo* that was probably Chaucer's source for *The Franklin's Tale*, includes an extended translation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The passage in Ovid describes the magical journey through which Medea adds years to her father-in-law's life. Boccaccio translates this material and uses it to describe Tebano's creation of a May Garden in January. Chaucer omits this magical digression from *The Franklin's Tale*, but I suggest it exerts a ghost of an influence on the *Tale* nonetheless. The expansive impulse of Ovid's and Boccaccio's texts helps to shape Dorigen's Complaint. The Complaint rallies all of the resources of form in an attempt to control the way that time is experienced. Dorigen deploys rhyme, meter, and syntax to motivate a constant forward movement through *exempla*, refusing to settle in a single, decisive moment. This is an effort that ultimately fails: the *Tale's* form resists complete explication and interpretation. Its sources and influence emerge unpredictably, creating a poetic landscape as complex as the rocky coast of Brittany.

Many of the readings in this dissertation focus on failed ambitions. The efforts of Chaucer's characters to manipulate the progress of history—peeling it back, regulating it, or resisting its unpredictable effects—are continually belied by the historicity of Chaucer's poetics. My intent has not been to generate a deterministic reading of *Troilus*

or *The Canterbury Tales*, yet the historicity of Chaucer's poetic form becomes particularly evident when set against the controlling ambitions of some of its characters. If there is an element of inevitability to Chaucer's form, it is in the recognition that literary history has unpredictable effects on the production of new texts.

The tendency of Chaucer's form to resist confinement within a particular moment might also appear to impose an insistently linear historicity upon these poems. Carolyn Dinshaw has recently demonstrated the creative potential of non-linear, "queer" temporalities, among them the "expansive now" of Hope Emily Allen, infinitely revising her manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe*.²⁰ Dinshaw's encompassing now appears to be precisely opposed to the evasive moment of Chaucer's composition, as I describe it. However, whereas Dinshaw's focus is on the shape of temporality, my own is on form. As Dinshaw observes, linear temporality presents "only one newly empty now after another."²¹ Form, however, has a tendency to be attached to a determinate "then," a particular creative moment or informing idea. Chaucer's poetry reveals the instability of that moment, its tendency to be pressured by older texts and to produce surprising new possibilities. Such a creative process might, in a different reading, very well be understood as occupying an "expansive now." Yet my own emphasis is on the diversity of intent, of literary influence, and of aesthetic effects within the poems I read.

²⁰ Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC, 2012), 122.

²¹ Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, 2.

This process of composition resists predictability and control. It permits analysis only in retrospect.²² As *Anelida and Arcite* shows, even when one is obsessively focused on the past, memories—whether of people or of texts—exert their influence in surprising forms. Chaucer’s poem ends with a recapitulation of the Complaint’s opening refrain. Anelida concludes:

But as the swan, I have herd seyde ful yore,
Ayens his deth shal singen his penaunce,
So singe I here my destinee or chaunce,
How that Arcite Anelida so sore
Hath thirled with the poynt of remembraunce.
(*Anel* 346-530)

Anelida, speaking long before the founding of Carthage, hints that her song is an imitation of Dido’s, a nod to the fictionality of the claim that Chaucer is recovering a Theban story. Yet it is unclear whether Anelida’s story inscribes itself into a larger cyclical history or simply finds itself there by chance. The lines “herd seyde ful yore” could simply be a capitulation to rhyme. Indeed, Anelida herself appears uncertain over whether her impending end is destiny or the mere product of historical coincidence: “destinee or chaunce.” The term “chaunce” itself hinges upon the need for a rhyme, since Chaucer must incorporate the opening refrain into this stanza’s final verse. He does so both by incorporating the term “chance” and by altering the line’s figurative significance. The prick of memory is no longer wielded by an abstract sword, but rather Arcite himself, with memory standing in for Anelida’s desired physical consummation. Despite the fact that Arcite is mediated by memory, he still exerts transformative pressure on

²² Cf. Maura Nolan, “Making the Aesthetic Turn: Adorno, the Medieval, and the Future of the Past,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 549-75.

Anelida. She is the one remembering, yet she finds herself transformed from subject into object, pierced by her own memories. As the ostensible writer of the Complaint (she is said to inscribe it into a letter) Anelida's formal agency is thus shaped by a mediated but powerful past. Arcite himself evades complete understanding, yet his influence is constantly felt. In a similar way, I argue, Chaucer's poetry absorbs the pressure of literary history as it exerts constant, unpredictable, transformative pressure upon his poetic form.

CHAPTER ONE

“Save Oure Tonges Difference:” Translation, Literary Histories, and *Troilus and Criseyde*

Book Two of *Troilus and Criseyde* opens with an account of the ways that language and culture change over time, warning that the reader might be surprised by the practices of the ancient Trojan lovers. Perhaps more surprising than Chaucer’s attention to historical relativity is the implication that such differences will be visible within *Troilus* itself. The notion that a poem translated from a *Trecento* Italian source might represent something of the specificity of ancient Trojan behavior is blatantly fictional. But what kinds of difference might the Book Two prologue acknowledge, fictionalize, or anticipate? One influential critical approach to *Troilus* has emphasized the culture shock Chaucer might have experienced in his encounter with Italian literary traditions. In 1932, C. S. Lewis proposed that Chaucer found in Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato* a perspective on love that offended his medieval sensibilities.²³ Critics including David Wallace have since shown that *Trecento* Italy was much more familiar political and literary ground for Chaucer than Lewis assumed, and that Chaucer “understood before he ‘transformed.’”²⁴ This chapter will look for difference in this very process of transformation, asking not so much what Chaucer “did to” a foreign source text as what effects translation might have on the

²³ C. S. Lewis, “What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*,” in *Chaucer’s Troilus: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (Hamden, CT, 1980), 37-54. Originally published in *Essays and Studies* 17 (1932): 56-75.

²⁴ Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings*, 2. Cf. David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, CA, 1997). See also Warren Ginsburg, *Chaucer’s Italian Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2002), which emphasizes the difficulty Chaucer may have experienced in constructing a literary tradition for Dante’s *Commedia*.

temporal, formal, and lexical self-identity of Chaucer's own poetry. I will suggest that *Troilus* explores the possibility of difference within its own language, how self-difference emerges as a condition of an ever-changing vernacular poetry developed through the process of close translation.

Italian textual culture will figure in this discussion as comparative context for *Troilus*, for interrelated issues of translation and historical difference played an important role in the copious Italian tradition of vernacular translation, or *volgarizzamento*. With the important exception of K. P. Clarke's recent *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, *volgarizzamenti* have rarely factored into discussions of Chaucer's Italian inheritance.²⁵ Yet these translations permeated Italian textual culture between 1250 and 1350. Alison Cornish observes, "of the 134 vernacular manuscripts dating from before 1350 catalogued in a recent census of the national library in Florence, 97 of them have content that can be described as a *volgarizzamento* of classical or medieval material."²⁶ Assessing Chaucer's direct contact with *volgarizzamenti* represents a considerable challenge, not least because these translations vary widely between individual manuscripts. However, multiple scholars of the *volgarizzamento* movement, including Cornish, Giulano Tanturli, Cesare Segre, and Maria Teresa Casella, have pointed to an important trend among *volgarizzatori* that, read broadly in the context of techniques for representing the difference of the past, might help illuminate the intersections between translation and

²⁵ K. P. Clarke, *Chaucer and Italian Textuality* (Oxford, 2011). See especially 9-46, on Filippo Ceffi's *volgarizzamento* of Ovid's *Heroides*.

²⁶ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 1.

historical relativity in Chaucer's poetry.²⁷ These scholars have shown that over the course of the first half of the *Trecento*, certain *volgarizzatori* involved in the transmission of Roman history began to resist translation, moving from an anachronistic approach that substituted modern equivalents for ancient terms to a practice that preserved ancient vocabulary and syntax.²⁸ I will briefly trace the contours of this development, before turning to Dante's very different approach to close translation and historical knowledge. Comparison with *volgarizzamenti* casts into relief important parallels between Chaucer and Dante: their mutual doubt regarding the possibility of representing the specificity of ancient texts in translation and their emphasis on linguistic change, making both the original text and the language of translation shifting, moving targets. In *Convivio*, Dante carries out very close formal and lexical translations, but at the same time expresses skepticism over the extent to which the formal qualities of the source text can survive in translation. Instead, *Convivio* emphasizes the stakes of vernacular translation with respect to its effects on, and representation of, the receiving language. Translation opens a space for exploring and developing the capacity of a mutable, changing vernacular.

²⁷ Cf. Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 64-69; Cesare Segre, *Volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento* (Milan, 1952), 18-45; Maria Teresa Casella, *Tra Boccaccio e Petrarca: i volgarizzamenti di Tito Livio e di Valerio Massimo* (Padua, 1982); Giuliano Tanturli, "Volgarizzamenti e ricostruzione dell'antico: i casi della terza e quarta Deca di Livio e di Valerio Massimo, la parte del Boccaccio (a proposito di un'attribuzione)" *Studi medievali* 27 (1986): 811-88.

²⁸ See Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd edition (Routledge, NY, 2008) 1-34 on the relationship between translations that aim for "domestication" and those invested in "foreignization." Venuti emphasizes that these are ethical categories, and their alignment with particular translation techniques must be understood in historical context.

Considering the relationship between translation techniques, historical knowledge, and the development of the vernacular in Italy can help generate perspective on Chaucer's representation and practice of translation in *Troilus*.²⁹ The *Troilus* narrator's claim to translate the customs of Trojan lovers without updating them suggests that, like certain *volgarizzamenti*, Chaucer's poem might carry over something of the strangeness and specificity of the ancient world. Yet the fictions surrounding the representation of translation in *Troilus* trouble attempts to get back to authentic historical knowledge through the syntax or lexicon of translation. Whatever strangeness or self-difference there might be in *Troilus* cannot easily be identified with a specific source or a particular time. Chaucer resembles Dante in recognizing that the effects of translation are bound up in the self-representation of his own receiving vernacular language. But Chaucer pushes these effects to their limit, using them to explore the way that the interaction between English poetry and source text generates instability and self-difference at the heart of *Troilus*'s own lexicon, in the poem's definition of love. The historicity that *Troilus* explores, I will argue, includes that of its own vernacular.

Italian *volgarizzamento* is both vast in scope, taking in "classical, historical, encyclopedic and moral texts," and largely unconcerned with challenging linguistic authority.³⁰ As Alison Cornish explains, *volgarizzamenti* take a supplementary, ancillary position with

²⁹ On Chaucer's engagement with translation techniques in England, see Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge, U.K., 2008), 75-99. Cf. also Ralph Hanna III, "The Difficulty of Ricardian Prose Translation: The Case of the Lollards," *Modern Language Quarterly* 51 (1990): 319-40.

³⁰ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 157.

respect to the Latin texts they translate, underscored by their tendency to accrete revisions and updates. As she puts it, “volgarizzamento is a phenomenon of reading and reception. It is not about substituting itself for authority, but rather about keeping the authorities up to date.”³¹ The makers of these translations included judges and notaries, but many *volgarizzamenti* circulated anonymously, perhaps a reflection of their status as conduits for Latin learning rather than autonomous vernacular productions.³² Cornish, Tanturli, and others trace developments centered in Florence, but it is important to note that the phenomenon of *volgarizzamento* was not isolated to Florence or Tuscany: for example, Venice played an important role in the transmission and translation of French texts and was the site for one of the earliest Boethius *volgarizzamenti*, now lost.³³

Among early *volgarizzamenti*, the form and lexicon of translation frequently suggest a direct, utilitarian association between ancient and medieval cultural and political life. This is the case in Brunetto Latini’s *Rettorica* (1260-66), an incomplete translation of and commentary on Book One of Cicero’s *De inventione*, and in Florentine judge Bono Giamboni’s *Fiore di rettorica* (1258-66), a translation of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.³⁴ Both of these translations apply ancient rhetorical teaching to modern civic

³¹ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 7.

³² Cf. Massimo Zaggia, *Heroides: volgarizzamento fiorentino trecentesco di Filippo Ceffi*, vol. 1 (Florence, 2009), 3-48 for an overview of Florentine *volgarizzamento* that gives special attention to the problem of attributions and anonymity.

³³ On the complex role that Italian scribes and translators, especially in Venice, played in the transmission of French histories and romances, see Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 70-100. On the putative Venetian Boethius, see Segre, *Volgarizzamenti*, 286 and Giulio Bertoni, *Poeti e Poesie del Medio Evo e Rinascimento* (Modena, 1922), 203-212.

³⁴ *La Rettorica di Brunetto Latini*, ed. Francesco Maggini, 2nd edition (Florence, 1968); Bono Giamboni, *Fiore di Rettorica*, ed. Giambattista Speroni (Pavia, 1994), xv. For the

activities.³⁵ Brunetto, who understands rhetoric as a category of civil science, even includes letter writing, *ars dictaminis*, within its scope.³⁶ Virginia Cox recognizes a “spirit of energetic and creative anachronism” in these texts, one that manifests itself in the tendency to translate ancient terminology with medieval vernacular equivalents.³⁷ Thus both Brunetto and Bono translate *respublica* as *comune* and, as Cox puts it, “the Senate is transfigured into a communal *consiglio*.”³⁸ *La Rettorica* also exemplifies the tendency of early *volgarizzatori* to work through intermediaries. Brunetto includes a commentary on Cicero’s text in which he styles himself “sponitore” (expositor), but he actually translates much of his hermeneutical material from a twelfth century Latin commentary.³⁹ Other Tuscan *volgarizzamenti* drew directly on intermediary sources.

dating of Brunetto’s text, see *Li Livres dou Tresor de Brunetto Latini*, ed. Francis J. Carmody (Berkeley, CA, 1948), xvii-xviii.

³⁵ See the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome, 1976), vol. 6, 61-62 on the language and style of Brunetto and Bono’s writing.

³⁶ Cf. Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 31; and Ronald G. Witt, “Brunetto Latini and the Italian Tradition of *Ars Dictaminis*” *Stanford Italian Review* 3 (1983): 5-24.

³⁷ Virginia Cox, “Ciceronian Rhetoric in Late Medieval Italy” in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, eds. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward (Leiden, 2006), 109-143, at 116. On aspects of Brunetto’s political and pedagogical identification with Cicero, see Giuliano Tanturli, “Continuità dell’umanismo civile da Brunetto Latini a Leonardo Bruni” in *Atti del II Congresso dell’Internationales Mittellateinerkomitee, Firenze, Certosa del Galluzzo, 11-15 settembre 1993*, ed. C. Leonardi (Florence, 1998), 735-80; and Enrico Fenzi, “Brunetto Latini, ovvero il fondamento politico dell’arte della parola e il potere dell’intellettuale,” in *A Scuola con Ser Brunetto: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi Università di Basilea, 8-10 giugno 2006*, ed. Irene Maria Scariati (Florence, 2008), 323-69.

³⁸ Cox, “Ciceronian Rhetoric,” 116.

³⁹ *La Rettorica* 1.7 proposes that the author of the work is “doppio”: the category includes both Cicero and Brunetto, the latter being “quella persona cui questo libro appella sponitore.” Cf. Gian Carlo Alessio, “Brunetto Latini e Cicerone (e i dettatori),” *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 22 (1979): 123-69. See also Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 143-57, which argues that Brunetto’s identity as vernacular translator—and *sponitore*—underlies Dante’s critique of his predecessor in *Inferno* 15.

Massimo Zaggia indicates that Florentine translations of ancient history in the late *Duecento* and the opening of the *Trecento* were almost exclusively mediated through French texts. These translations included the *Istorietta troiana* (translated in the final years of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth), which descends from Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, and a *volgarizzamento* of the *Epistulae ad Lucilium* of Seneca (completed by 1326) that, as Zaggia notes, was translated not from the Latin, but from an Old French translation of Seneca's epistle produced at the court of Naples (1308-1310).⁴⁰

As Zaggia explains, over the course of the first half of the *Trecento*, Florentine readers developed an increasingly "mature" taste for Roman history.⁴¹ Rather than relying on compilations, translators turned to Roman sources including Sallust, Valerius Maximus, and Livy.⁴² The Valerius and Livy translations in particular, which underwent extensive expansions and revisions, have provided a central focus for critical discussions of the relationship between translation techniques and historical difference. The most popular *volgarizzamento* of the first Decade of *Ab urbe conditis*, produced in the 1320s, was translated using a French intermediary. But later copies of this *volgarizzamento*, as

⁴⁰ Zaggia, *Heroides*, 13-14.

⁴¹ Zaggia, *Heroides*, 14.

⁴² On the Sallust translation, produced in the first years of the *Trecento* by Pisan Bartolomeo da San Concordio, O.P., see Zaggia, *Heroides*, 15; and Segre, *Volgarizzamenti*, 33-35 and 401-445. See Dorothy M. Schullian, "A Revised List of Manuscripts of Valerius Maximus," in *Miscellanea Augusto Campana* (Padua, 1981), 695-728 on the massive popularity of Valerius Maximus in the middle ages: Schullian lists over 500 surviving manuscripts of Latin and vernacular versions of *De dictis factisque*.

Zaggia notes, took pains to eliminate the “patina” of French that colored its language.⁴³ Translations of the third and fourth Decades (the fourth can be dated to before 1346; the third more nebulously to the 1340s or 50s) were based on Petrarch’s reconstructed Latin text, suggesting a stronger attention to the “fisionomia dei testi originali,” (“the features of the original texts”) as Zaggia puts it.⁴⁴ Giuliano Tanturli has shown that the translator of the third Decade in particular pays close attention to the original Latin lexicon, translating the Latin *miles* as *milite* as opposed to the fourth Decade’s *cavaliere*.⁴⁵ The *volgarizzamento* of Valerius Maximus’s *De dictis factisque memorabilibus*, meanwhile, went through multiple stages over the course of the fourteenth century. The earliest translation, probably made in the first years of the *Trecento*, seems to reflect the translator’s lack of understanding, carrying over “raw Latinisms” that a subsequent Valerius *volgarizzamento*, known as the vulgate, revises into clear Italian.⁴⁶ But the vulgate itself underwent a revision (sometime after 1325) that re-introduced Latin words and phrases.⁴⁷ Thus *doctrina*, translated *scienza* in the vulgate, remains *doctrina* in the

⁴³ Zaggia, *Heroides*, 26. One fragmentary copy survives of a different *volgarizzamento* of the first Decade of *Ab urbe conditis*, based directly on the Latin text. It is part of ms. Vaticano Barberiniano lat. 4086, a Florentine anthology from the 1330s or 40s that also includes *volgarizzamenti* of the *De amore* and the *Aeneid* (the translation attributed to Andrea Lancia) and an early copy of *Convivio*. See Luca Azzetta, “Un’antologia esemplare per la prosa trecentesca e una ignorata traduzione da Tito Livio: il Vaticano Barb. Lat. 4086,” *Italia medievale e umanistica* 35 (1992): 31-85.

⁴⁴ Zaggia, *Heroides*, 24, 14. The fourth Decade’s mention of Ostagio da Polenta, who died in 1346, provides a *terminus ante quem* for the translation. See also Tanturli, “Volgarizzamenti e ricostruzione,” 819.

⁴⁵ Tanturli, “Volgarizzamenti e ricostruzione,” 821-33.

⁴⁶ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 67.

⁴⁷ For the relationship between these three versions, known as Va (the earliest, “primitive,” version) V1 (the vulgate) and V2 (the revised version) see Tanturli, “Volgarizzamenti e ricostruzione,” 839-43 and Adriana Zampieri, “Una primitiva

revised version. The translator of the revised version translates the figurative expression “pallium togae subici” (“the Greek mantle to be subordinated to the toga”) literally as “sottomettere il mantello a la toga” (“to subordinate the mantle to the toga”) as opposed to the vulgate’s interpretive “sottomettere alla dignitate romana” (“to subordinate to Roman dignity”).⁴⁸

Certain manuscripts of the vulgate Valerius Maximus also accreted layers of glosses, in which different scholars, along with “curious readers,” comment on problems of translation.⁴⁹ In some cases, glossing the lexicon of translation itself becomes a site for negotiating between historical alterity and identification. An example of this function of glossing comes from a different tradition of Valerius Maximus translation. As Cornish explains, an “embryonic form” of the glosses that would later be applied to the vulgate Valerius can be found in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Ferraioli 559.⁵⁰ The glosses in this manuscript frequently use the explication of words as a site for negotiating cultural alterity. For example, a gloss on “scenaculo” (“senate”) reads, “scenaculo era uno luogo

redazione del volgarizzamento di Valerio Massimo,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 10 (1977-78): 21-41. For the dating of the versions, see also Lippi Bigazzi, “Il Valerio Massimo volgare: altre ricerche,” *Studi di filologia italiana* 54 (1996): 97-152, at 152. Bigazzi suggests a date before 1313 for the vulgate version. Much critical discussion of the Livy and Valerius Maximus *volgarizzamenti* has been dedicated to Casella’s argument that Boccaccio was responsible for them, a position that Zampieri, Tantarli and Bigazzi’s articles have since disproven in every case except the fourth Decade of Livy. See also Simone Marchesi, “Fra filologia e retorica: Petrarca e Boccaccio di fronte al nuovo Livio,” *Annali d’Italianistica* 22 (2004): 361-74.

⁴⁸ Casella, *Tra Boccaccio e Petrarca*, 155. See also Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 67.

⁴⁹ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 66. See also Tantarli, “Volgarizzamenti e ricostruzione,” 842-62 and Andrea Valentini, “Per l’edizione critica del commento C-D al Valerio Massimo volgare: la classificazione dei testimoni,” in *Studi sul volgarizzamenti italiani due-trecenteschi*, eds. Paolo Rinoldi e Gabriella Ronchi (Rome, 2005), 167-99.

⁵⁰ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 68.

commune quasi come uno mercato, ove riparava la gente.”⁵¹ (“The senate was a common place almost like a market, where the people gathered.”) The content of this gloss seemingly drains the senate of its specific significance. Whereas *mercato* is a generic term, Valerius’s original term, *senatus*, refers to an actual site in the Roman forum. But the form of the gloss indicates the possibility that difference between past and present might creep in as a lack of understanding or a failure of translation. The term “quasi,” “almost,” suggests that historical knowledge is based on approximation, not identity. Meanwhile, in order to generate the comparison, the glossator must cast a critical eye over his own cultural landscape, searching out an analogue for “scenaculo” based on the social function of a “mercato.” The process of glossing thus opens up a sense of the glossator’s own historicity.

However, it is important to note that in Italy, this kind of perspective does not simply emerge fully formed. Giuliano Tanturli describes the process of revising and glossing Valerius Maximus as “il lavoro [. . .] di una cultura, che muove animosamente e per tempo alla scoperta e alla ricostruzione del mondo antico.” (“the work [. . .] of a culture, which moves in spirit and over time towards the discovery and reconstruction of the ancient world.”)⁵² These changes in historical understanding have been connected with the ultimate decline of *volgarizzamento* in the second half of the *Trecento*. As Cornish observes, the increasing resistance to translation among the revisers of Livy and

⁵¹ My transcription and translation from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Ferraioli 559 f. 6r. I have transcribed all passages in Latin and Italian according to the standards in Giampaolo Tognetti, *Criteri per la trascrizione di testi medievali latini e italiani* (Rome, 1982). In this passage, I have modernized u and v and modernized words divisions.

⁵² Tanturli, “Volgarizzamenti e ricostruzione,” 862.

Valerius Maximus ultimately leads to a point where “the reality of the ancient world can be ‘understood but not translated.’”⁵³

Although the literal translation of Latin syntax and vocabulary demonstrates an increasing interest in the specific historical lexicon of Latin texts, this kind of translation also has implications for the receiving language. It is in exploring these implications that Dante’s approach to translation in his own work of prose vernacular science, *Convivio*, most clearly intersects with, and ultimately diverges from, the practices of *volgarizzatori*. Cesare Segre argues that the Latinisms of third and fourth Decades of Livy represent an attempt to develop vernacular style through contact with Latin prose: “i volgarizzatori cercano di impadronirsi del segreto costruttivo della prosa latina: oltre che la bellezza, vogliono scoprire gli ingredienti della bellezza” (35).⁵⁴ (“The *volgarizzatori* seek to master the hidden structure of Latin prose: along with beauty, they want to uncover the ingredients of beauty.”) Zaggia similarly identifies a new proficiency with vernacular prose in these translations, one that he associates with Dante’s sense of the potential of the vernacular. He proposes that Dante, though he is no *volgarizzatore*, is most like these vernacular translators in his “orgoglio del nuovo volgare” (“pride in the new vernacular”), a language capable of expressing the highest levels of learning.⁵⁵

In *Convivio*, Dante himself uses translation both to grow and to display the expressive breadth of the vernacular. Massimiliano Chiamenti’s taxonomy of Dante’s

⁵³ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 68. Cornish quotes Tantarli, “Volgarizzamenti e ricostruzione,” 873. Massimo Zaggia compares the parabola of *volgarizzamento* to Boccaccio’s career, with the enthusiasm for vernacular learning waning in the context of a humanism that was “senz’altro latino.” See Zaggia, *Heroides*, 8.

⁵⁴ Segre, *Volgarizzamenti*, 35.

⁵⁵ Zaggia, *Heroides*, 7.

translation practices shows that *Convivio* includes a proliferation of one-to-one (“uno-a-uno”) translations, typically in the form of short lines quoted in translation from Scripture or the *auctores*. By “uno-a-uno,” Chiamenti intends “traduzione aderentissima al SL, del quale si mantengono l’*ordo* e le singole parole, tradotte secondo la loro accezione più comune e decontestualizzata, il che comporta inevitabili forzature e inerzialità nel TL.”⁵⁶ (“Translation that is highly adherent to the source language, in which one maintains word-order and individual words, translated according to their most common and decontextualized meaning, which entails inevitable distortions and inertia in the target language.”) For example, Dante creates a calque on the Latin in a quotation of Matthew 7:15-16: “Adtendite a falsis prophetis / qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium / intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces / a fructibus eorum cognoscetis.” (“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits you shall know them.”)⁵⁷ Dante writes, “E però si legge nel Vangelio di santo Mateo—quando dice Cristo: “Guardatevi dalli falsi profeti”--: “Alli frutti loro conoscerete quelli” (IV.xvi.10). (“Therefore we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew Christ’s words: “Beware of false prophets . . .; you shall know them by their fruits.”) As Chiamenti points out, the construction “alli frutti [. . .] conoscerete,” translating the Latin *a/ab* with *a*, draws the Italian preposition away from its usual meaning and seems a “latinismo improprio,” (“improper Latinism”). But Chiamenti reads this translation technique less as straightforward fidelity to the original text’s structure than as *aemulatio*: Dante would go on to use the same prepositional structure twice in the

⁵⁶ Massimiliano Chiamenti, *Dante Alighieri traduttore* (Florence, 1995), 12.

⁵⁷ Translation from the Douai-Rheims Bible.

Commedia.⁵⁸ More broadly, Chiamenti suggests that the close translations in *Convivio* explore “la possibilità di una riproduzione, in lingua di sì, di costrutti e lemmi del repertorio latino.”⁵⁹ (“The possibility of a reproduction of the constructions and terms of the Latin repertoire in the language of sì.”) Dante’s straightforward presentation of this passage as a quotation from Matthew at once indexes the vernacular’s assumption of a Scriptural register and elides his source’s Latinity. The impression created is similar to that which Zygmunt Barański identifies in *Vita Nuova*’s translated quotations: “a fluid, ‘unproblematic’ interchangeability between languages—an exchange between equals.”⁶⁰ Although Dante’s close attention to the syntax of his Latin source anticipates certain developments in *volgarizzamento*, the emphasis in his quotations falls not on the untranslatability of Latin, but on the capacity of the vernacular to communicate different kinds of truth.

This is not to say that the process of translation carries over the full formal effects of the original text: Dante’s explicit comments on translation in *Convivio* emphasize the difficulty of retaining such information. As if to underscore its distance from the kind of vernacular learning found in *volgarizzamenti*, *Convivio* touches only briefly on translation, and never directly theorizes its own *praxis*. Instead, the subject arises in the

⁵⁸ Chiamenti, *Dante Alighieri*, 34 gives this example and analysis. See *Inferno* 23.73-74 and *Purgatorio* 23.71-72. See also the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* vol. 6, 90, 346.

⁵⁹ Chiamenti, *Dante Alighieri*, 25.

⁶⁰ Zygmunt G. Barański, “The Roots of Dante’s Plurilingualism,” in *Dante’s Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, eds. Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gragnolati, and Jürgen Trabant (London, 2012), 98-121, at 113. See also in the same volume Sara Fortuna and Manuele Gragnolati, “Dante After Wittgenstein” *Aspetto, Language, and Subjectivity from Convivio to Paradiso*,” 223-47, which discusses the poetic and semantic effects of moving terms between different linguistic contexts.

context of Dante's defense of writing commentary in the vernacular. Dante unpacks the relationship between main text and commentary through the analogy of master and servant, explaining how Latin commentary would not be a good servant to his vernacular poetry. Among the problems with Latin commentary is that it would have exceeded the wishes of the vernacular *canzoni* by making their meaning available to readers of different vernaculars, like the Germans and the English. It would have been against the will (*volere*) of the *canzoni*, Dante argues, for their meaning to be conveyed where their beauty (*bellezza*) cannot follow (I.vii.13). Dante illustrates his point with a critique of the translation of verse:

E però sappia ciascuno che nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si può della sua loquela in altra transmutare senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza ed armonia. E questa è la cagione per che Omero non si mutò di greco in latino come l'altre scritture che avemo da loro. E questa è la cagione per che i versi del Salterio sono senza dolcezza di musica e d'armonia; ché essi furono transmutati d'ebreo in greco e di greco in latino, e nella prima transmutazione tutta quella dolcezza venne meno.

(I.7.14-15)

Therefore everyone should know that nothing harmonized according to the rules of poetry can be translated from its native tongue into another without destroying all its sweetness and harmony. This is the reason why Homer has not been translated from Greek into Latin as have been other writings we have of theirs. And this is the reason why the verses of the Psalter lack the sweetness of music and harmony; for they were translated from Hebrew into Greek and from Greek into Latin, and in the first translation all their sweetness was lost.

Translation, Dante argues, breaks the rules of rhythm and meter that bind poetry together, and this destroys *dolcezza*.⁶¹ Chiamenti summarizes the passage in quantitative form:

“*poesia* (non traducibile) = *prosa* (traducibile) + *musica* (non traducibile)” (“poetry =

⁶¹ See Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, “Parole di Dante: ‘musaico,’ in *Lingua nostra* 30 (1969): 33-34, for the argument that *musaico* signifies “musical” in this passage.

prose (translatable) + music (un-translatable)”), as if the transition between languages could isolate the defining characteristics of poetry.⁶² Yet as Chiamenti observes, the actual writing of poetry supercedes such theoretical constructions: are Dante’s nuanced, formally complex translations from Scripture, which include lines of Psalter itself, really inattentive to the aspects of formal beauty that survive in translation?⁶³ *Convivio* does not provide any specific answer to this dilemma, but does slightly shift the emphasis of the problem of sweetness in translation. As Gianfranco Folena points out, *Convivio*’s comments on the translation of poetry derive from Jerome’s defense of the language of Holy Scripture against the assumption, based on readings in translation, that its language lacks grace.⁶⁴ Jerome argues, “Quod si cui non videtur linguae gratiam interpretatione mutari, Homerum ad verbum exprimat in Latinum.”⁶⁵ (“If anyone does not see that the grace of language is changed in translation, let him render Homer word for word in Latin.”) But whereas Jerome is anxious to promote the grace of the original Hebrew text, Dante takes the *dolcezza* of Scripture for granted even though neither he, nor the majority of his vernacular readers, could have known it. The original poetry is, for all practical purposes, taken out of the equation that Chiamenti describes. Already mediated through

⁶² Chiamenti, *Dante Alighieri*, 197.

⁶³ Cf. the discussion of the conflict between Dante’s translation theory and *praxis* in Chiamenti, *Dante Alighieri*, 203-8. My reading confines itself to *Convivio*, but as Chiamenti’s discussion shows, the question of the formal beauty of Psalter translations has important implications for the *Commedia*, where the Psalms contribute lines to Dante’s poetry, both in Latin and in Italian. See also Kevin Brownlee, “Why the Angels Speak Italian: Dante as Vernacular Poeta in *Paradiso* XXV,” *Poetics Today* 5 (1984): 597-610.

⁶⁴ Gianfranco Folena, *Volgarizzare e tradurre* (Turin, 1991), 30.

⁶⁵ *Interpretatio Chronicorum Eusebii*, Praef. 1-2 (PL 27.223).

several linguistic layers, the music of the Hebrew Psalter does not provide an accessible point of comparison for the formal qualities of Psalter translations.⁶⁶

Instead of focusing attention on the accurate representation of the source text, *Convivio* associates the stakes of translation, especially translation into prose, with its representation of the receiving language. *Convivio* argues that prose is the genre most capable of exposing a language's expressive capacity: as Dante explains, his own prose commentary will demonstrate “la gran bontade del volgare di sì” (“the great goodness of the vernacular of sì”), something that poetry cannot do because of the “accidentali adornezze che quivi sono connesse” (“the accidental adornments that are tied to it”) (I.x.12). And Dante recognizes that, should he write his commentary in Latin, he would lose control over the appearance of any subsequent vernacular prose translation:

Onde, pensando che lo desiderio d'intendere queste canzoni [a] alcuno illitterato averebbe fatto lo comento latino transmutare in volgare, e temendo che 'l volgare non fosse stato posto per alcuno che l'avesse laido fatto parere, come fece quelli che transmutò lo latino dell'Etica—ciò fue Taddeo ipocratista—, providi a ponere lui, fidandomi di me più che d'un altro.

(I.x.10)

Thinking, therefore that the desire to understand these canzoni would have induced some unlearned person to have the Latin commentary translated into the vernacular, and fearing that the vernacular might have been set down by someone who would have made it seem offensive, as did the one who translated the Ethics from Latin—and that was Thaddeus the Hippocratist—I arranged to set it down, trusting in myself more than in another.

The object of Dante's criticism is the *volgarizzamento* of Aristotle's *Ethics*—actually based on Hermannus Alemannus's Latin translation of the *Summa Alexandrinorum*, itself

⁶⁶ Dante also emphasizes the problem of ignorance of the source text in terms of meaning: in *Convivio* Two, he notes that Aristotle's true meaning in a particular passage of the *Meteorologica* cannot be assessed due to the discrepancy among translations (II.xiv.5-7).

based on an Arabic version of a Greek epitome of the *Nicomachean Ethics* —carried out by Taddeo Alderotti *circa* 1260.⁶⁷ Alderotti’s translation constitutes an extensively mediated and altered *Ethics*, but Dante is primarily concerned with how it represents its own vernacular. As Alison Cornish puts it, “the *Convivio* is in effect a preemptive *volgarizzamento* motivated by jealousy. It is not so much that Alderotti was a bad Latinist: he was a bad writer of the vernacular.”⁶⁸ For Dante, translation conveys not so much the *dolcezza* of the source text, but the potential of the receiving language. Practitioners of vernacular translation must therefore recognize that the representation of the vernacular itself is at stake in their work.

Dante’s *volgare* represents a diffuse and complex object of representation, however, and translation *praxis* stretches its syntax and lexicon still further.⁶⁹ This very flexibility disassociates vernacular writing from the timeless stability that *Convivio* associates with Latin.⁷⁰ Instead, over time the vernacular becomes unfamiliar and foreign:

Onde vedemo nelle cittadi d’Italia, se bene volemò aguardare, da cinquanta anni in qua molti vocaboli essere spenti e nati e variati; onde se ’l picciol tempo così

⁶⁷ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 131-32. As Cornish explains, this translation was incorporated wholesale into the Italian version of Brunetto’s *Tresor*. She proposes that Dante’s reference to Alderotti can be read as a metonymic condemnation of the *Tresor*. On the Italian *Ethics*, see Sonia Gentili, *L’uomo aristotelico alle origini della letteratura italiana* (Rome, 2005), 27-55. The *Summa Alexandriorum* was Hermannus Alemannus’s Latin translation (finished in 1243 or 44) of a ninth century Arabic translation of an Alexandrine-Greek epitome produced sometime before the seventh century.

⁶⁸ Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 131. Cf. Chiamenti, *Dante Alighieri*, 199-200.

⁶⁹ See Paola Manni, *Il Trecento toscano: La lingua di Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio* (Bologna, 2003), 135-61, on the remarkable polymorphism of the *Commedia*.

⁷⁰ The contradiction between the natural, changing vernacular and the movement towards stability underpins much of Albert Ascoli’s discussion of authority in *Dante and the Making*. See especially 130-74 on the *vulgare illustre* in Dante’s early works. See also Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Linguistica e retorica di Dante* (Pisa, 1978), on the contradictions inherent in *De vulgari eloquentia*’s discussion of the vernacular.

transmuta, molto più transmuta lo maggiore. Sì ch'io dico, che se coloro che partiro d'esta vita già sono mille anni tornassero alle loro cittadi, crederebbero la loro cittade essere occupata da gente strana, per la lingua da[lla] loro discordante. (I.5.9)

Thus in the cities of Italy, if we care to take a close look, we find that within the last fifty years many words have become obsolete, been born, and been altered; if a short period of time changes language, much more does a greater period change it. Thus I say that if those who departed this life a thousand years ago were to return to their cities, they would believe that they were occupied by foreigners, because the language would be at variance with their own.

Convivio's comments on translation might be best understood in the context of its larger conception of the vernacular's past and future. The term *transmutare* describes both translation and linguistic change; according to Gianfranco Folena, Dante is unique in using this word to indicate translation among Italian writers.⁷¹ The Latin precedent of Jerome, who uses *mutare* to describe the reduction of the grace of the Hebrew Scriptures, underscores the emphasis on loss in Dante's representation of translation. Folena suggests that the semantic field of *transmutare* is "vasto, ma non tecnicizzato: è il verbo che indica il divenire e il mutare delle cose umane sottoposte alla fortuna, come la lingua, i costumi,

⁷¹ See Folena, *Volgarizzare*, 38, which cites some Latin antecedents. The *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. 5, 699, gives the basic significance of *transmutare* as "l'azione di modificare la forma o l'aspetto di una persona o di una cosa." The term describes the transformations of the thieves in *Inferno* 25 (25.101-3; 143-44). However, the *Enciclopedia* also cites instances where the term suggests an exchange or change in location, usages that depart less radically from the etymological significance of *translatio* (*Purg.* 3.132; *Par.* 15.6). Related discussions have arisen in the context of *Il Fiore*, where Falsembiante describes his acts of deception with an etymologically related term: "Così vo io mutando e suono e verso" (103, 6). From Dante Alighieri, *Fiore, Detto d'amore*, ed. Paola Allegretti (Florence, 2011). Cf. Zygmunt G. Barański, "The Ethics of Literature: The *Fiore* and Medieval Traditions of Rewriting," in *The Fiore in Context: Dante, France, Tuscany*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Patrick Boyde (Notre Dame, IN, 1997), 207-232 on the relationship between *Il Fiore* and translation in Dante.

le leggi e la società.”⁷² (“Broad, but not systematic: it is the verb that indicates the becoming and the transformation of human things under the influence of fortune, such as language, customs, laws, and society.”) Translation responds to the condition of linguistic division and change, and it involves inevitable further loss as texts move between linguistic and cultural contexts. Instead of looking back to ancient texts as standards for translation, Dante emphasizes the present: the way that a given translation represents the receiving language. The process of translation plays its own role in the transformation of languages: far from being without histories, the translations in Dante’s text are embedded in the history of the changing vernacular of *sì*.⁷³ *Convivio* argues that the bonds of rhyme and meter can give definition to this vernacular and prevent its further change.⁷⁴ But what if translation actively pushed against poetic and lexical unities?⁷⁵ How might the incorporation of foreign poetics and syntax into a vernacular text make visible the gradual processes of formal and lexical change that, when added up over the years, register the difference of the past? I will argue that Chaucer explores these possibilities in his own discussion of linguistic change and practice of translation in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

⁷² Folena, *Volgarizzare*, 38.

⁷³ On the precise historical relationship posited between Latin and the vernacular of *sì*, cf. Mirko Tavoni, “Volgare e latino nella storia di Dante” in *Dante’s Plurilingualism*, 52-68.

⁷⁴ See Ascoli, *Dante and the Making*, 108-121 on the connections between this claim and *Convivio* Four’s derivation of *auctor* from *avieo* in *Convivio* IV.vi.

⁷⁵ See the discussion of post-Babelic language in John Fyler, *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun* (Cambridge, U.K., 2007), 54, which contrasts Dante’s attempts to “shape human poetry to the purposes of the divine” with Chaucer’s poetry of the “earthbound and partial.” Fyler expands on this comparison at 101-154.

In the prologue to Book Two of *Troilus*, Chaucer's narrator claims that his literal, naive translation techniques will be unable to resolve the cultural differences between ancient and modern lovers. The reader might therefore be confronted with the seemingly strange customs of ancient Trojans. *Troilus*'s narrator has long attracted extensive critical attention, including A. C. Spearing's recent suggestion that the poem has no single, distinct narratorial voice at all.⁷⁶ Here, however, I want to focus on how Chaucer uses the narrator's professions of incompetence to explore the implications of a certain kind of translation practice, one that shares key details with the importation of Latin syntax and terminology among the later *volgarizzatori*. Chaucer articulates an assumption similar to that underpinning the resistance to translation among these revisers and expanders: leaving certain aspects of a text untranslated can preserve some of its historical specificity.⁷⁷ But in *Troilus*, Chaucer locates historical specificity not in an occupation (like *milite*) or in an idiomatic expression, but in love. The narrator claims that his inexperience in love prevents him from understanding the original text's emotional content. Instead, he says, "of no sentement I this endite / but out of Latyn in my tonge it write," as though love itself might remain untranslated, a remainder of the past, in *Troilus* (II.13-14).

⁷⁶ A. C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford, 2005). For earlier important approaches to the *Troilus* narrator, see E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (Durham, NC, 1983), 84-101; David Lawton, "Irony and Sympathy in *Troilus and Criseyde*: A Reconsideration," *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 14 (1983): 94-115; and Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI, 1989), 28-64.

⁷⁷ See A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge, U.K., 1982), 67, which suggests that the opening to Book Two assumes the objective and distanced stance of "compiling historian."

Specifically, the narrator explains that he is unable to update his source's representation of the ways that different people "wynnen love" (II.27). Such practices, he explains, change as rapidly as language itself. He illustrates the point with the same Horatian commonplace on linguistic change that Dante draws on in *Convivio*.⁷⁸ Chaucer's alterations to Horace resemble Dante's, for both use linguistic change as a way to conceive of the difference of the past. Chaucer writes,

Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge
 Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
 That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
 Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
 And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
 Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,
 In sondry londes, sondry ben usages.
 (II.22-28)

Both Chaucer and Dante integrate the possibility of linguistic strangeness into what is, for Horace, primarily an account of the mortality of poetry. The *Ars Poetica* urges the poet to take the opportunity to invent new words, especially using Greek origins. Yet precisely because language changes, the charm of poetry dies out and, as Horace explains, "debemur morti nos nostraque" (we are doomed to death—we and all things ours):

[. . .] mortalia facta peribunt,
 nedum sermonum stet honos et gratia vivax.
 multa renascentur quae iam cecidere, cadentque

⁷⁸ On the question of whether Chaucer actually knew and used *Convivio*, cf. Alastair Minnis, "'Dante in Inglissh': What *Il Convivio* Really Did for Chaucer," in *Essays in Criticism* 55 (2005): 97-116; Minnis proposes that *Convivio* IV provided Chaucer with an orthodox source for concepts of nobility. For an early and extensive treatment, see J. L. Lowes, "Chaucer and Dante's *Convivio*," *Modern Philology* 13 (1915): 19-33. See J. Huisinga, "An Early Reference to Dante's Canzone 'Le dolci rime d'amor,' in England," *The Modern Language Review* 17 (1922): 74-78 for comments on the circulation of knowledge about *Convivio*. Cf. also Howard Schless, *Chaucer and Dante: A Revaluation* (Norman, OK, 1984), 115-16.

quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,
quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi.⁷⁹

All mortal things shall perish, much less shall the glory and glamour of speech endure and live. Many terms that have fallen out of use shall be born again, and those shall fall that are now in repute, if Usage so will it, in whose hands lies the judgment, the right and the rule of speech.

Horace works with the assumption that the attractiveness of speech relies on currency, giving the poet and his words a limited lifespan. “Usus” acts as a general principle that dictates the duration of all poetry. In contrast, Dante’s comments on linguistic change imagine language as having a kind of visible afterlife. If only we could return a thousand years after our deaths, we would be able to see our fellow citizens speaking a foreign language. Chaucer takes the notion of recognizable linguistic difference further: the strangeness of ancient language becomes an instructive analogue for the strange customs of the ancients. The generalized principle of Horatian “usus” becomes “usages,” with Chaucer’s plural term registering a diversity of methods of communication in different times and places.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Chaucer expands the inevitability of linguistic change into a broad statement of geographical and temporal difference: “in sondry londes, sondry ben usages.” And finally, Chaucer—or at least, his narrator—suggests that because of his

⁷⁹ Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, with translation by H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA, 1929), lines 63, 68-72.

⁸⁰ For a synchronic approach to difference in the vernacular, see Christopher Cannon, “Chaucer and the Language of London,” in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge, U.K., 2006), 79-94, which describes the different occupational usages that divide Chaucer’s London. See also Butterfield’s introduction to the volume, pp. 3-22, at 17, which cites an unpublished article by Barbara Nolan, “‘Usage’ in *Troilus and Criseyde*: A Literary Lineage,” tracing the connections between Chaucerian “usage” and *usus* in the *Ars Poetica* and Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*.

inability to interpret and thereby update pagan practice, this difference may actually be visible in the poem itself.

But does this difference really matter? As the narrator pushes his comments on cultural and linguistic difference to their extreme conclusion, moving from “sondry londes” to individuals, he reduces difference to the level of pronouns and empty references: “scarsly ben ther in this place thre / that have in love seid lik, and don, and al” (II.43-44). Difference becomes such a general condition that it can be described in generic terms: “this place” could be any place. The distinction between lovers’ speech is ultimately unimportant, the narrator argues, because regardless of their methods, all lovers seek the same conclusion:

For every wight which that to Rome went
Halt nat o path, or alwey o manere;
Ek in som lond were al the game shent,
If that they ferde in love as men don here,
As thus, in opyn doying or in chere,
In visityng in forme, or seyde hire sawes;
Forthi men seyn, “Ecch contree hath his lawes.”
(II.36-42)

The seemingly strange practices that different lovers employ in “sondry londes” and ancient times all lead to the same goal. This does not mean that these practices are interchangeable: as the narrator notes, “in som lond were al the game shent, / If that they ferde in love as men don here.” But it does mean that these different customs are equally capable of achieving the same end in their proper contexts.⁸¹ Chaucer uses the same

⁸¹ Morton Bloomfield identifies in the Book Two comments on linguistic change “the medieval and Greek sense of a permanence underlying all change—the one behind the many;” see “Chaucer’s Sense of History,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51 (1952): 301-313, at 308.

analogy in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, where he argues that different languages can express the same scientific conclusions “right as diverse pathes leden diverse folk the righte way to Rome” (Prologue, 39-40). In *Astrolabe*, this argument emphasizes the instrumentality of English, its ability to accomplish the same goals as any other language. But in *Troilus*, it seems out of place in the context of the narrator’s professed ignorance about love and lack of “sentement.” How can he assert the transcendent presence of a single purpose for the behavior of all lovers, a “Rome,” that he himself does not understand? By describing “Rome” and the “game” of love exclusively in metaphor, the narrator leaves the nature of love itself in question, bound up in figurative language and un-interpreted.

The assumption that lovers in different times and places share a common goal manifests itself in literary form, facilitating the forward movement of the first half of *Troilus*’s narrative. Pandarus plans out his work on behalf of Troilus according to a strong concept of its purpose. Yet the description of his rhetorical strategizing at the end of Book One again leaves the goal itself unstated:

For everi wight that hath an hous to founde
 Ne renneth naught the werk for to bygynne
 With rakel hond, but he wol bide a stounde,
 And sende his hertes line out fro withinne
 Aldirfirst his purpos for to wyne.
 (I.1065-69)

Following the teaching of Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Pandarus carefully conceives his “werk” in his mind before executing it.⁸² The first line of this passage anticipates the narrator’s

⁸² On the possibility that Chaucer knew these lines from a compilation rather than the *Poetria nova* itself, see James J. Murphy, “A New Look at Chaucer and the

“every wight which that to Rome went:” both passages represent the process of journeying to love—whatever form that journey might take—as a common activity, something that can be imagined in generic, almost programmatic terms. Pandarus is able to set his scheme into motion on the basis of the assumption that Troilus desires a familiar, comprehensible goal. But in contrast, as Davis Taylor points out, Troilus himself makes no assumptions about the commonality of his experience.⁸³ Taylor quotes the observation of Reta Anderson Madsen in an unpublished PhD dissertation: for Troilus, “neither his emotions nor his reactions are dulled by the recognition that others have felt and reacted in the same way and with predictable results.”⁸⁴ From Troilus’s perspective, neither the experience of love nor his desires are universal, and as he attempts to define his experience, the language that he uses to describe it takes on importance in all of its specificity. For example, in the Book One *Canticus Troili*, which the remainder of this chapter will consider, Chaucer imports a Petrarchan sonnet constructed through paradox and self-contradiction. The *Canticus* generates for Troilus a definition of love that cannot be assimilated by easy assumptions about the common desires of lovers, one that leads to ethical and formal stasis.⁸⁵

Rhetoricians,” *Review of English Studies* n.s. 15 (1964): 1-20. See also Marjorie Curry Woods, *Classroom Commentaries: Teaching the Poetria nova across Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Columbus, OH, 2010).

⁸³ Davis Taylor, “The Terms of Love: A Study of Troilus’s Style,” *Speculum* 51 (1976): 69-90.

⁸⁴ Taylor, “The Terms,” 83. Taylor cites Reta Anderson Madsen, “Some Functions of Medieval Rhetoric in Chaucer’s Verse Narratives,” Diss. Yale University, 1967, 207.

⁸⁵ See John V. Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer’s Troilus* (Lincoln, NE, 1990), 181-84, on the disjuncture between the love explored in the *Canticus* and that at work in the narrative exchanges between Troilus and Pandarus.

Chaucer registers the distinctness and specificity of the *Canticus*'s language even as he frustrates its assignment to a single time, place, or individual perspective. The preface to the *Canticus* anticipates the Book Two prologue in its insistence on literal translation. The narrator claims to translate Troilus's song word for word, as though incorporating into the poem a verbal and sonic relic of the past:

And of his song naught only the sentence,
As writ myn auctour called Lollius,
But plainly, save oure tonges difference,
I dar wel seyn, in al, that Troilus
Seyde in his song, loo, every word right thus
As I shal seyn; and whoso list it here,
Loo, next this vers he may it fynden here.
(I.393-99)

The narrator confidently bypasses concerns about the loss of metrical and sonic bonds in translation, even though the very fact that rhymed English stanzas follow "next this vers" belie his claim to close lexical translation.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the invocation of Lollius indexes the inevitable layers of mediation between Troilus and the narrator: even without the insights of source study, the reminder that the narrator works through an "auctor" underscores the impossibility of getting back to an authentic version of Troilus's words.⁸⁷ Yet Chaucer calls attention to the form of the *Canticus* nevertheless, representing it as

⁸⁶ Chaucer's claims to translate faithfully even as he diverges from his source are similar to those of his important source, Benoît's *Roman de Troie*. See Penny Sullivan, "Translation and Adaptation in the *Roman de Troie*," in *The Spirit of the Court*, eds. Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (Cambridge, U.K., 1985), 350-59, on Benoît's claims to translate faithfully and David Rollo, "Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*: Historiography, Forgery, and Fiction," *Comparative Literature Studies* 32 (1995): 191-225, on Benoît's skeptical approach to his sources.

⁸⁷ Cf. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject*, 154 on Lollius as "a mumbling together of sources, disparate and even contradictory." See also George Kittredge, "Chaucer's Lollius," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 28 (1917): 47-133.

strange and foreign, even though the separation of the *Canticus*'s language from Chaucer's language is practically impossible.

The source that Chaucer actually uses for the *Canticus* comes from outside of his own vernacular but quickly infiltrates its lexicon, carrying out an act of definition on *Troilus*'s central term. Petrarch's sonnet 132, "S' amor non è," interrogates how the speaker's experience relates to "amor" and what the nature of "amor" might be:

S' amor non è, che dunque è quel e ch'io sento?
ma s' egli è amor, per Dio, che cosa et quale?
se bona, ond' è l'effetto aspro mortale?
se ria, ond' è sì dolce ogni tormento?

S' a mia voglia ardo, ond' è 'l pianto e lamento?
s' a mal mio grado, il lamentar che vale?
O viva morte, o diletto male,
come puoi tanto in me s' io nol consento?

Et s' io 'l consento, a gran torto mi doglio.
Fra sì contrari venti in frale barca
mi trovo in alto mar senza governo,

sì lieve di saver, d'error sì carica
ch' i' medesmo non so quel ch' io mi voglio,
e tremo a mezza state, ardendo il verno.⁸⁸

If it is not love, what then is it that I feel? But if it is love, before God, what kind of thing is it? If it is good, whence comes this bitter mortal effect? If it is evil, why is each torment so sweet?

If by my own will I burn, whence comes the weeping and lament? If against my will, what does lamenting avail? O living death, O delightful harm, how can you have such power over me if I do not consent to it?

And if I do consent to it, it is wrong of me to complain. Amid such contrary winds I find myself at sea in a frail bark, without a tiller,

⁸⁸ Text and translation from *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA, 1976).

so light of wisdom, so laden with error, that I myself do not know what I want;
and I shiver in midsummer, burn in winter.

In the *Canzoniere*, this sonnet is the first poem in a triptych on “the exploration of love and its phenomena.”⁸⁹ As Piero Boitani explains, it borrows the form of the Scholastic *quaestio*, using the structure of enunciation and interrogation to explore the “quid” and “qualis” of love.⁹⁰ Yet this scientific form breaks down in the context of love; as Boitani points out, “this nice, rhetorical as well as ‘intellectual, ratiocative,’ in sum, scholastic *quaestio* has in fact no answer [. . .]. Instead we enter the realm of metaphor, where the field is at first taken by a frail bark, rudderless upon open seas and blown by contrary winds.”⁹¹ Not only in overall structure but also in grammar and lexicon, Petrarch appropriates the language of inquiry from other sources. “Che dunque è quel ch’io sento” echoes Augustine’s “quid est quod sentio” in the *Soliloquies* and two questions that Dante puts to Virgil in the *Commedia*: “Maestro, che è quel ch’i’ odo?” (*Inf.* III.32); “O dolce padre, che è quel ch’i’ odo” (*Purg.* XXIII.13).⁹² The sonnet tests out different forms of questioning in the face of an oxymoronic, contradictory experience. As a source for Chaucer, it represents an exploration of the meaning of love that pays special attention to the terms of its own inquiry.⁹³

⁸⁹ Piero Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, U.K., 1989), 56. See also Warren Ginsberg, “Chaucer and Petrarch: ‘S’amor non è’ and the *Canticus Troili*,” *Humanist Studies & the Digital Age* 1 (2011): 121-27.

⁹⁰ Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime*, 57.

⁹¹ Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime*, 57.

⁹² Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milan, 1996), 649n1-2.

⁹³ Along with its imitation of the Scholastic *quaestio*, it has also been suggested that the sonnet emulates classical forms: cf. Dominique Diani, “Pétrarque: *Canzoniere* 132,” *Revue des Études Italiennes* n.s. 18 (1972): 111-67.

As Chaucer interprets, expands, and imitates these forms, he might be said to historicize his own “forme of speche,” developing the syntax, structure, and lexicon of the *Canticus*—and, ultimately, its definition of “love”—though the encounter with a literary precursor. The translation often works at a very literal level, allowing the syntax and form of the Italian sonnet to impress themselves upon *Troilus*’s grammar and poetics.

The *Canticus* reads:

If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
Whenne every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
For ay thurst I the more that ich it drynke.

And if that at myn owen lust I brenne,
From whennes cometh my waillynge and my pleynte?
If harm agree me, wherto pleyne I thenne?
I noot, ne whi unwery that I feynte.
O quike deth, O swete harm so queynte,
How may of the in me swich quantite,
But if that I consente that it be?

And if that I consente, I wrongfully
Compleyne, iwis. Thus possed to and fro,
Al sterelees withinne a boot am I
Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two,
That in contrarie stonden evere mo.
Allas, what is this wondre maladie?
For hote of cold, for cold of hote, I dye.

(I.401-420)

Chaucer’s expansion of the sonnet into a three-stanza structure, evocative of a French *ballade*, assimilates the Petrarchan poem to expectations shaped by French poetry.⁹⁴ It is

⁹⁴ On the pervasive influence of the three-part *ballade* in *Troilus*, see James I. Wimsatt, “The French Lyric Element in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 15

as if *Troilus*'s poetics act as a moving target for translation, developing in the process of conjoining different formal traditions. The opening stanza of the *Canticus* produces a strange hybrid of Italian and English through an excessively literal rendering of the Italian syntax. Chaucer mirrors the position of almost every word in the Italian except for the negative particle, which he must position earlier in the phrase in order to avoid nonsense ("if love not is.") The result, far from being a faithful translation of the Petrarchan sonnet, is the possibility that there might simply be no love. This line differs from Petrarch, but also offers a rebuke to the easy comfort that, earlier in his lamentations, Troilus seeks in maxims about love ("remembryng hym that love to wide yblowe / Yelt bittre fruyt, though swete seed be sowe") (l.384-385). Chaucer is again stubbornly literal in translating Italian interrogatives: Petrarch's "che cosa et quale?" becomes "what thing and which is he?" Instead of taking the two interrogatives together, as the modern translation does, Chaucer leaves them in a paratactic structure. Troilus is left to make his investigations through a series of terms whose basic assumptions about love shift and change, moving back and forth between the translation of "cosa" as "thing" and "egli," from line two, as "he." The inconsistency between love as thing and love personified continues as the poem returns to the impersonal "it" in line four but then uses "hym" in line six. The extremely close translation in these lines does not, as the narrator implies, provide unfiltered information about the source text, for the very act of translating alters the significance of Petrarch's syntax and lexicon. Instead, it produces a

(1985): 18-32, at 22-24. See also Douglas Gray, "Middle English Courtly Lyrics: Chaucer to Henry VIII" in *A Companion to Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge, U.K., 2005): 120-49, at 124-25, on the Middle English *ballade* and its relationship to the French.

hybrid discourse whose unpredictable, shifting terms disrupt Troilus's movement towards a coherent understanding of "love."

In the second stanza of the *Canticus*, Chaucer enters more fully into the structure of the sonnet's paradoxes. As Paul Strohm notes, the paradoxes in sonnet 132 would not be strange for readers familiar with Jean de Meun, Alain de Lille, or scholastic discourse itself.⁹⁵ But Petrarch's sonnet provides a space for Chaucer to explore how their role in structuring prosody tends towards toward self-replication and stasis. Chaucer expands the symmetry of the second stanza of the sonnet: he breaks lines five and eight, both of which consist of two clauses, into two lines each in the English poem. Lines six and seven remain largely intact. And at the very center of the stanza, Chaucer adds a single, self-contained line to complete the English metrical structure: "I noot, ne whi unwery that I feynte." William Rossiter proposes that the central line represents "a state of breathlessness" between the inhalation of the first three lines and the exhalation of the second.⁹⁶ A parallel reading might see it as negative space: a formal expansion of the Italian poem that avoids substantive content. Chaucer's only addition to this portion of the poem at once imitates Petrarch's discourse and takes the shape of a deferral: "I noot." Chaucer makes a show of his proficiency with Petrarchan contradictions by compressing his own contribution into a single half line. But at the same time, the addition indexes the formal stasis created by the paradoxes, discovering self-replication, rather than synthesis, at their center.

⁹⁵ Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text*, (Minneapolis, MN, 2000), 89.

⁹⁶ William T. Rossiter, *Chaucer and Petrarch* (Cambridge, U.K., 2010), 124.

The final stanza of the *Canticus* draws the contradictions of the Petrarchan sonnet to their extreme conclusion in the context of a pre-Christian worldview. This stanza introduces the most extensive changes into the Italian, but does so in part through omission, for as Piero Boitani notes, Chaucer leaves out the moralizing approach of the final stanza of the sonnet.⁹⁷ Both Petrarch and Chaucer repeat the final term of the poem's central series of contradictions in order to move forward: Petrarch observes, "E s'io 'l consento, a gran torto mi doglio," and moves into an account of his ship "senza governo," light of wisdom and heavy with error. Troilus, meanwhile, notes, "And if that I consente, I wrongfully / Compleyne, ywis," and then rearticulates his paralysis, imagining his ship "bitwixen wyndes two, / that in contrarie stonden evere mo." William Rossiter proposes that in the *Canticus*, the two winds represent the problem of negotiation between different cultural and textual referents, "the translation continuing to search for a fixed identity."⁹⁸ But Troilus's more immediate paralysis arises from the contradictions of stanza two, which remain unmitigated by a moralizing interpretation. Boitani notes that elsewhere in the poem, Pandarus tries to break up such impasses by constructing joy as the outcome of sorrow: its "inevitable complement [. . .] but later in time."⁹⁹ Yet in the space of the lyric itself, Chaucer pushes the logic of paradoxes to a paralytic conclusion. The investigation breaks down and Troilus turns to a new discourse, personification, which allows him to pray passively to the "God of Love" (I.421). By stripping away the moralizing aspects of Petrarch's sonnet and dwelling on its particular

⁹⁷ Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime*, 72.

⁹⁸ Rossiter, *Chaucer and Petrarch*, 128.

⁹⁹ Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime*, 73.

syntax and lexicon, the *Canticus* pushes one mode of linguistic and poetic investigation to its limits. Troilus arrives at a definition of love that differs from itself, a paradoxical account that motivates a return to the veneration and figuration—rather than the comprehension—of love.

Love thus emerges from the *Canticus* as a term that resists universality, one whose meaning is embedded in the language used to describe and define its effects. The *Canticus*'s paradoxes themselves deny a concrete definition of love, suggesting contradictions in its meaning that the assumptions of Pandarus and the narrator about the desires of lovers simply gloss over. But more to the point, the *Canticus* enters into the structural, formal, and argumentative logic of the paradoxes and, in so doing, arrives at a point of complete stasis and disunity with the love narrative that follows. The only way to move away from the *Canticus* is to shift to a different mode of representing love. Because of the limits that Chaucer places on the *Canticus*—removing any moralizing resolutions to its dilemmas—it might be read as a representation of ancient modes of analysis. Troilus attempts to work towards a definition of love using terminology and forms that reflect his pagan perspective. His ultimate failure suggests that “oure tonges difference,” broadly conceived, matters: defining love without the aid of a moralizing discourse leads Troilus to formal and conceptual stasis. Yet the actual terms in which the *Canticus* interrogates love have a much more complex genesis than simple resistance to translation. Chaucer draws Italian syntax and prosody into English and incorporates it

into the development of his own grammar and poetics.¹⁰⁰ As fifteenth-century scribes recognized, the *Canticus* has a place in a contemporary literary program: along with other examples of lyric poetry in *Troilus*, it was identified and taxonomized in the margins of manuscripts.¹⁰¹ That is to say, the form of the *Canticus*, as well as the stasis in which it results, represent possibilities of Chaucer's own vernacular poetry. The strangeness and disjuncture created by exploring these possibilities become evident when the *Canticus* is set within the narrative movement of *Troilus*. Chaucer's translation of Petrarch's sonnet embeds within *Troilus*'s progress a "forme of speche" that resists a stable definition of the goal driving the poem's events: the narrator's "Rome" or the end of Pandarus's game.¹⁰² The history that the *Canticus* makes visible can be understood as the history of

¹⁰⁰ Compare Rita Copeland's accounts of the relationship between translation, imitation, and appropriation in Roman translation theory and Middle English practice in *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Tradition and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, U.K., 1991), 21-36 and 179-220.

¹⁰¹ Barry Windeatt, "Classical and Medieval Elements in Chaucer's *Troilus*," in *The European Tragedy of Troilus*, ed. Piero Boitani (Oxford, U.K., 1989), 111-31. See also Gray, "Middle English Courtly Lyrics," for the types of lyric in *Troilus*. The *Canticus* also circulated independently: see Julia Boffey, *Manuscripts of Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, U.K., 1985), 72. See also Julia Boffey, "The Reputation and Circulation of Chaucer's Lyrics in the Fifteenth Century," *Chaucer Review* 28 (1993): 23-40 on Chaucer's influence with respect to three areas in lyric writing: form, rhetorical strategies, and diction and phrasing. The variety of lyric genres explored in *Troilus* also bears comparison with French *dits* like Machaut's *Remède de Fortune*. Cf. James I. Wimsatt, "Guillaume de Machaut and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Medium Aevum* 45 (1976): 277-93 and Wimsatt, "The French Lyric Element."

¹⁰² Cf. Murray J. Evans, "'Making Strange': the Narrator (?), the Ending (?), and Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 87 (1986): 218-28, which argues that Chaucer fragments his narrative voice and his ending in order to defamiliarize stock responses and put pressure on the reader. My argument differs by suggesting that defamiliarization occurs as part of an ongoing process of the development of vernacular poetry through processes of translation and adaptation.

Chaucer's language, as it takes in different forms that define and redefine *Troilus*'s own key terms.

In *Troilus*, translating into a developing vernacular poetry does not mean simply introducing diverse syntax and terminology into an ostensibly stable receiving tradition, but recognizing that the process can have a significant effect on the target language and its poetry. As Chaucer and Dante both note, the small-scale changes in language that take place over a few years give us perspective on the complete alienation that takes place over a long enough span of time. Translation magnifies and accelerates this process of change, and the specific lexical and formal effects of translation might therefore contribute to recent critical discussions of temporal disjunctures within *Troilus*. Paul Strohm describes the moment of Chaucer's poem as "marked by traces or residues of an unexhausted past, and equally by intimations of an uncompleted or unrealized future."¹⁰³ Meanwhile, George Edmondson uses the language of psychoanalysis to describe Chaucer's encounter with the "universalism" of *Il Filostrato*, in which the narrator identifies with the long-dead Troilo. Edmondson proposes,

if there is a universalism to be found in *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is one based not on a regime of unification but on the radical proposition that what we share is not just difference but self-difference: the kind of internal heterogeneity brought on by the sudden realization that one can be deracinated even from one's own situation in history, thrown out of time by the untimely appearance of the future.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Strohm, *Theory*, 93.

¹⁰⁴ George Edmondson, *The Neighboring Text: Chaucer, Boccaccio, Henryson* (Notre Dame, IN, 2011), 128.

Strohm, too, gestures towards psychoanalysis in his suggestion that *Troilus* “possesses something very like a temporal unconscious.”¹⁰⁵ Italian *volgarizzamenti*, which Chaucer may not have known about at all—and, even if he did, he certainly could not have known the developmental arcs traced by critics like Cornish and Tantarli—do not provide a more “authentic” model than psychoanalysis for describing the temporal complexity of Chaucer’s language. But *volgarizzamenti* contribute to the discussion by directing attention to the texture of the language of translation; its capacity to gesture towards temporal difference and, in so doing, to become different from itself. At the same time, *Convivio*’s consideration of vernacular translation in terms of the prestige and the development of the “volgare di sì” serves as a reminder that one of the primary types of historicity represented in translation is the historicity of the target language itself. Both of these approaches to translation may be at play in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The poem’s representation of love reflects its contact with other sources and its attempts to represent ancient perspectives, producing an unstable, shifting term at the poem’s conceptual center. Translation provides a space to imagine the difference of the past, yet at the same time registers an ongoing and inevitable movement towards a literary future.

¹⁰⁵ Strohm, *Theory*, 84.

CHAPTER TWO

“An holy boond:” Form and the Search for Order in *Troilus and Criseyde* III-IV

The hymn that opens Book Three of *Troilus and Criseyde* imagines Love as a hidden source of order and meaning behind worldly events.¹⁰⁶ Love’s presence, even if unseen, provides an assurance that the world obeys a law and ultimately makes sense. As the *Troilus* narrator, addressing Love, insists,

Ye knowe al thilke covered qualitee
Of thynges, which that folk on wondren so,
Whan they kan nought construe how it may jo
She loveth hym, or whi he loveth here,
As whi this fissh, and naught that, comth to were.
(III.31-35)

People marvel at the teeming chaos of the human and natural world, from the way that lovers choose one another to the significance of catching a particular fish.¹⁰⁷ Love assigns a “lawe” to these events, and the narrator imagines his own poetry participating in the diffusion of its power, asking Love, “ye in my naked herte sentement / Inhielde, and do me shewe of thy swetnesse” (III.43-44). But what would it mean to write poetry that obeys a transcendent, universal law?¹⁰⁸ Love unifies the natural world, making sense of it by integrating it into a larger, overarching pattern, but can it do the same for poetry?

¹⁰⁶ The title of this chapter refers to *Boece* 2m8.22.

¹⁰⁷ Chaucer translates Boccaccio in these lines, but shifts attention from love’s power to its multiple manifestations in the natural world. Cf. B. A. Windeatt, ed., *Troilus and Criseyde* (London, 1984), 251 for a summary of these changes.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. the description of the “chain of love” in Bernard L. Jefferson, *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius* (Princeton, 1917), 65-66: “if left to itself, each object would pursue its course independently of all other objects. The universe would be a flux. [. . .] But to rescue the universe from this confusion, exists the bond of love, emanating from Providence. It restrains and unalterably binds together the diverse elements so that serenity is brought out of chaos.”

Chaucer asks for Love's inspiration as his verse spills over in the enjambment of "sentement / Inhielde," emphasizing its own, formal organization. Rhyme and meter provide poetry with a law of its own, what Dante describes as a "legame," or bond.¹⁰⁹ Does Chaucer really represent this formal bond as participating in Love's order? If not, than what origins does he assign to his poetic form, and what kind of perspective on Love's bonds can it achieve?

Over the course of *Troilus* Book Three, thematic attempts to search out order and meaning behind Trojan history are paralleled by Chaucer's reverse chronological movement through the sources of his own poetic form. As critics including B.A. Windeatt have demonstrated, Chaucer closely translates much of *Troilus and Criseyde* from Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*.¹¹⁰ The immediate source for the Book Three prologue is Troilo's song to Venus from *Il Filostrato*'s third book. However, in Boccaccio's text, the song does not appear until late in Book Three, after the consummation of the love affair. Chaucer's adaptation transplants the song, moving it forward in the timeline of events so that it opens his third book. As a result, once Chaucer reaches the narrative moment in *Troilus* corresponding with Troilo's song, he requires a replacement for the material he has already used. He solves this problem by translating Boccaccio's own original source for Troilo's song: Book Two, Meter Eight of *The*

¹⁰⁹ *Convivio* I.vii.14.

¹¹⁰ Windeatt, *Troilus*, op. cit. See also Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings*. Windeatt and Wallace demonstrate the nuance and extent of Chaucer's engagement with Boccaccio, but the relationship between the two texts was established much earlier. The classic early discussion of *Troilus*'s use of the *Filostrato* is Lewis, "What Chaucer Really Did."

Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius.¹¹¹ Thus, over the course of *Troilus* Book Three, Boethius's meter makes two appearances: first diffused through the mediating presence of *Il Filostrato*, and then more directly translated into Chaucer's English. Even as the *Consolation* provides a vocabulary for imagining love as a source of binding causality, Chaucer amplifies its role as a material cause of his own verse.

This chapter will explore the intersection between Chaucer's representation of the development of his own poetic form and *Troilus*'s narrative explorations of causality, order, and determinism. Central to this discussion will be the repeated gesture of looking back to older language and earlier discourses for formal structure. Chaucer himself turns back both to Boethius and to his own prose *Consolation* translation, the *Boece*, which he uses extensively in developing *Troilus*'s adaptation of Book Two Meter Eight.¹¹² The prosaic *Boece* seems a strange space to search out poetic organization. Yet it does appear to preserve certain formal memories of Boethius's prosimetrum. In the first half of this chapter, I will consider how *Boece* represents a key site for the recovery of Boethius's original forms. This possibility receives support from late medieval Italian translations of Boethius, a tradition as yet unexplored by Chaucerians, which I will discuss in detail. The final section of the chapter will describe how *Troilus*, drawing on *Boece*, searches out echoes of Boethian form that survive in translation and rearticulates them in poetry—and why this process matters. *Troilus* uses the rediscovery of literary form to embody the

¹¹¹ Cf. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 249, for a summary of these changes.

¹¹² See Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 143-45, on Chaucer's use of *Boece* as a source in *Troilus*. See also Tim William Machan, ed., *Chaucer's Boece: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library MS li.3.21 ff. 9^r-180^v* (Heidelberg, 2008), xii, for an alternative proposal: that Chaucer began *Boece* only after grappling with Boethian philosophy in *Troilus*.

search for transcendent order that drives the poem's protagonists. But in this very process, the poem's form ultimately undermines attempts to get outside of time and change. Even as *Troilus* imagines timeless, universal sources of order and meaning, Chaucer reveals these imaginings to be formal artifacts of an ongoing literary history.

Chaucer's *Boece* appears in many ways to neglect form. Like many late medieval translations, *Boece* is as much exposition as direct translation. As A. J. Minnis puts it, "translation and glossing [. . .] were thought of not as different and unrelated things, but rather as two aspects of the same activity, *expositio sententie*."¹¹³ Chaucer translates from the medieval vulgate version of the Latin *Consolation*, which differs significantly from the late antique text. In order to explain Boethius's text fully, he also uses three other sources: Jean de Meun's all-prose French *Consolation* translation (c. 1300), Nicholas Trevet's Latin commentary on the *Consolation* (c. 1300), and the "Remigian" tradition of commentary, based on a set of glosses attributed to Remigius of Auxerre (c. 841-908).¹¹⁴ In some cases, Chaucer uses Jean de Meun's uninflected French syntax to guide his rendering of the Latin. At other points, he adds gloss and explication not present in the main text. And occasionally, he uses his multiple sources to produce two translations of a

¹¹³ A. J. Minnis, "'Glosynge is a Glorious Thyng: Chaucer at Work on the 'Boece,'" in A. J. Minnis, ed., *The Medieval Boethius: Studies in the Vernacular Translations of De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Cambridge, U.K., 1987), 106-124, at 107. See also A. J. Minnis and Tim William Machan, "The *Boece* as Late Medieval Translation," in A. J. Minnis, ed., *Chaucer's 'Boece' and the Late Medieval Tradition of Boethius* (Cambridge, U. K., 1993), 167-88.

¹¹⁴ Cf. the literature review in Tim William Machan, ed., *Sources of the Boece* (Athens, GA, 2005), 3-10. For the dating of Trevet, see Ruth J. Dean, "The Dedication of Nicholas Trevet's Commentary on Boethius," *Studies in Philology* 63 (1966): 593-603, at 598-99.

single passage.¹¹⁵ The result is a text that sacrifices formal and lexical fidelity to the Latin text for the sake of complete exposition, even as Chaucer's use of multiple translations suggests an exploration of expressive possibilities in English. One expressive mode that Chaucer neglects, however, appears to be poetry. Not only is *Boece* in prose, but with its proliferation of explication, it seems uninterested in any exploration of constraint or stylistic economy.

Completely omitting any memory of the Latin *Consolation*'s form would represent a significant sacrifice of meaning. Both the plot and the organization of the *Consolation* rely on the oscillation of prose and verse. For Boethius, verse represents a mode of complaint, a soothing precursor to difficult philosophy, and a form of prayer. The *Consolation* opens with elegiac couplets that lament Boethius's turn to "mestos [. . .] modos" ("sorrowful meters") from the "carmina" ("songs") of his youth (1m1.2, 1).¹¹⁶ Chaucer, though he writes in prose, translates these terms with poetic and musical language: "vers of sorwful matere" and "delitable ditees" (1m1.2, 3). These references to poetry and song begin to lose significance once the entire text is translated into prose. The alternation between prose and verse also has practical importance as a finding aid for the *Consolation*'s readers. For example, the index placed at the beginning of manuscript Cambridge University Library MS II.3.21, a late fourteenth-century Boethius compendium, uses book number together with prose or verse number to help readers in

¹¹⁵ Cf. Tim William Machan, *Techniques of Translation: Chaucer's Boece* (Norman, OK, 1984) for a detailed explanation of these and other practices.

¹¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of the Latin Boethius refer to the Vulgate version published in Machan, ed., *Sources*.

search of specific subject matter.¹¹⁷ Entries include “Fortune *constancia* est sua mutabilitas. *Liber secundus prosa primus*” (“Fortune’s constancy is her mutability. Third book, first prose.”) and “Quem felicitas facit amicum infortunium facit inimicum. *Liber tertius prosa quator*” (“Whom happiness makes a friend, misfortune makes an enemy. Third book, fourth prose.”).¹¹⁸ For both thematic and organizational reasons, therefore, translators and copyists might hesitate to do away with Boethius’s formal structure completely. In some cases, *Boece* scribes did develop systems for organizing Chaucer’s prose that omit generic cues: the scribe of British Library MS Add. 10340 includes a table of *incipits* that numbers every section of each book in order, without distinguishing between verse and prose.¹¹⁹ But Cambridge University Library MS Ii.3.21, along with manuscripts such as scribe John Shirley’s copy of the *Boece* (British Library MS Add. 16165), uses the Latin generic rubrications *prosa* and *metrum* within the main text to divide up Chaucer’s all-prose translation.¹²⁰ These rubrications simultaneously gloss over

¹¹⁷ This remarkable bilingual manuscript is transcribed, with much of its layout preserved, in E.T. Silk, *Cambridge Manuscript II 3.21 and the Relation of Chaucer’s ‘Boethius’ to Trivet and Jean de Meung*, PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1930. See also Tim William Machan, “The *Consolation* Tradition and the Text of Chaucer’s *Boece*,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 19 (1997): 31-50. See also the comments in Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 143.

¹¹⁸ Cf. CUL MS Ii.3.21 f. 4r. I have transcribed all passages in Latin and Italian according to the standards in Giampaolo Tognetti, *Criteri per la trascrizione di testi medievali latini e italiani* (Rome, 1982). I have modernized u and v and modernized words divisions, marking omitted vowels with apostrophes. Expanded abbreviations are in italics. Accent marks have been added when necessary for comprehension. I have spelled out all Arabic numerals, marking these expansions with italics.

¹¹⁹ Cf. BL MS Add. 10340 f. 1r. The text itself has visual divisions between different sections, but no numbering or rubrication.

¹²⁰ This account derives from my own observations of *Boece* manuscripts and is intended to be exemplary, not exhaustive. Cf. Michael C. Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer*

the formal insufficiency of vernacular prose translation and reaffirm it.¹²¹ Boethius's references to prose and verse make sense, but only in the context of the older, Latin text, which the vernacular *Boece* merely approximates.

One *Boece* manuscript, however, appears to exchange this broad sense of generic deficiency for the possibility of rediscovering poetry within Chaucer's prose. The opening folio of Cambridge University Library MS Ii.1.38 (CUL Ii.1.38 from here forward), dated to the first quarter of the fifteenth century, lays out the *Boece*'s opening translated meter as non-metrical verse (figure one; for images cf. Appendix, pp. 164-66).¹²² A transcription of lines seven through thirteen of this folio (*Boece* 1m1.6-13), preserving lineation effects and representing colored majuscules in bold, reads,

At þe leeste no drede ne myghte overcomen þo muses þat þei ne
were felawes *and* folwyden my wey // þat is to seyn whan I was
exiled: They þat weren glorie of my 3outhen whiholm weleful
and grene conforten nowe þe sorwful wyerdes of me olde
man For elde is comyn unwarly uppon me hasted by þe
harmes þat y have and sorwe haþ comandid his age to ben *in* me.¹²³

In this passage, two of these colored letters begin phrases mid-line because of run-on, but they are the exception to the rule. As figure one shows, the last six colored majuscules are

Manuscripts: Works Before The Canterbury Tales (Aldershot, U.K., 1997), 43-53 for notes on all surviving *Boece* manuscripts.

¹²¹ See Cannon, *The Making of Chaucer's English*, 25, for a description of these rubrications as a "mime of formal change."

¹²² For this manuscript's date, cf. Seymour, *A Catalogue*, 50. CUL Ii.1.38 is the basis for the *Boece* edition prepared by Ralph Hanna III and Traugott Lawler for *The Riverside Chaucer* (1987). Cf. Machan, ed., *Chaucer's Boece*, xx-xxxviii on previous editions of *Boece* and Machan's own assessment of manuscript affiliations.

¹²³ CUL MS Ii.1.38 f.1r. My transcription modernizes u and v and italicizes expanded abbreviations. I have preserved the lineation, capitalization and punctuation of the original. Colored majuscules are signaled by boldface. Scribal corrections have been incorporated silently. Virgules are signaled by a backslash (/).

all aligned with the left margin. The scribe's care in dividing this passage into distinct units reflects an attentive reading of the relationship between *Boece's* Book One Meter One and its source, the elegiac couplets that open the Latin *Consolation*. The Latin vulgate version of these lines reads,

Has saltem nullus potuit pervincere terror,
Ne nostrum comites prosequerentur iter.
Gloria felicis olim viridisque iuvente
Solantur mesti nunc mea fata senis.
Venit enim properata malis opina senectus
Et dolor etatem iussit inesse suam.
(1m1.5-10)

These [the Muses], at least, no terror could overcome
So that they did not follow as companions on our way.
Once the glory of my happy and blooming youth
They console now my fate of sad old age.
Infirmity came unforeseen, sped by evils,
And grief commanded old age to enter me.¹²⁴

The divisions of CUL li.1.38 reflect prosodic divisions carried over from Boethius's elegiac couplets. Every colored majuscule marks off content that translates a Latin couplet. The double virgule partitioning off the phrase "þat is to seyn whan I was exiled," a glossorial addition not present in the Latin, confirms the scribe's concern to make the English translation correspond with the original verse. Moreover, at the same time as this layout gestures towards Latin poetry, it also corresponds with divisions in Chaucer's prose. Boethius's elegiac couplets are each a single sentence, which means that their syntactic divisions can, and, in this case do, easily survive in translation. By articulating

¹²⁴ My translation based on Victor Watts, trans., *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy* (London, 1999).

these divisions on the page, the CUL Ii.1.38 scribe recovers formal memories of Boethius's poetry within *Boece*'s prose.

What CUL Ii.1.38 does not make clear, however, is how sweeping a significance these memories have for defining the formal and hermeneutical attributes of Chaucer's prose. CUL Ii.1.38 only uses verse layout on its first folio. Every other translated meter in the manuscript is rubricated *metrum* but laid out as prose. The scribe uses paraps to divide content within the meters, but not in correspondence with the original Latin verse. CUL Ii.1.38's treatment of the first meter suggests less a coherent program of interpreting *Boece* than a metonymic gesture towards the *Consolation*'s original form. In order to understand how the *Consolation*'s formal properties can persist, and even flourish, in single genre translations, it may be instructive to turn to a different tradition of vernacular Boethius translation, that of late thirteenth and fourteenth-century Italy. These vernacular translations, or *volgarizzamenti*, are unlikely to have influenced Chaucer or his scribes. But several manuscripts of prose Italian Boethius translations use layouts similar to that of CUL Ii.1.38. Furthermore, all of the manuscripts discussed below are more consistent and detailed in their organization than the Cambridge manuscript. These manuscripts thus represent an opportunity to explore the full implications of using Boethius's Latin poetry to organize and interpret vernacular prose translation.

The earliest surviving Italian Boethius translation appears to have been produced in Florence in the late *Duecento*. It survives in three manuscripts: Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana MS Pl. 23 dext. 11, Biblioteca Riccardiana MS 1609, and Biblioteca

Riccardiana MS 1003.¹²⁵ The earliest of these is Riccardiana 1609, a complete all-prose translation copied in a Pisan dialect, which dates to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. However, Giuseppina Bruni's recent study of these manuscripts argues that Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Pl. 23 dext. 11 (BML from here forward) actually represents the earliest version of the *volgarizzamento* itself.¹²⁶ BML dates to the middle of the fourteenth century and was once held at the library of the Franciscans in Santa Croce, where Dante himself may have studied.¹²⁷ The manuscript contains a full Latin copy of the *Consolation* in a hand of the mid-fourteenth century. The *volgarizzamento* is copied in the margins, in a late fourteenth-century hand different from that of the main text, and consists of translations of Boethius's meters, and only the meters, up to Book Three, Meter Eleven.¹²⁸ The *volgarizzamento*'s dialect is Tuscan. The copyist of BML attributes the translations to Maestro Giandino da Carmignano, likely a resident of

¹²⁵ For an overview of Italian Boethius *volgarizzamenti*, see Silvia Albesano, *Consolatio Philosophiae volgare: Volgarizzamenti e tradizioni discorsive nel Trecento italiano* (Heidelberg, 2006), 45-53. Note however that Albesano lists Ricc. 1003 and 1609 as witnesses to a different translation from BML Pl. 23 dext. 11. See Gabrielle Pomaro and Robert Black, *La Consolazione della Filosofia nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento Italiano* (Florence, 2000), pp. 85-87 and especially Giuseppina Bruni, "Preliminari all'edizione del volgarizzamento della *Consolatio philosophiae*," in *Studi su volgarizzamenti italiani due-trecenteschi*, eds. Paolo Rinoldi and Gabriella Ronchi (Rome, 2005), pp. 9-45, on the relationship between all three manuscripts.

¹²⁶ See Bruni, "Preliminari."

¹²⁷ On Dante's education, cf. Ronald Witt, *"In the Footsteps of the Ancients": The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden, 2000) and Sergio Cristaldi, *La 'Vita Nuova' e la restituzione del narrare* (Messina, 1994), chapter one; cf. also G. Brunetti and S. Gentili, *Una biblioteca nella Firenze di Dante: i manoscritti di Santa Croce in Testimoni del vero. Su alcuni libri in biblioteche di autore*, ed. E Russo (Rome, 2000), pp. 21-55.

¹²⁸ Giuseppina Bruni, "Guinizzelli, il non più oscuro Maestro Giandino e il Boezio di Dante" in L. Rossi and S. Alloatti Boller, eds., *Intorno a Guido Guinizzelli* (Alessandria, 2002), 155-91. See 163-64 for the dating of these hands, for which Brunetti consulted Armando Petrucci.

Florence in the last decades of the *Duecento*.¹²⁹ The manuscript also includes marginal and interlinear Latin glosses reflecting the influence of Nicholas Trevet, as well as a few isolated vernacular glosses, in some cases deriving from Guillaume de Conches' commentary on the *Consolation*.¹³⁰

Like many *volgarizzamenti*, the translations in BML participate in the exegetical project of opening up and explicating the Latin text. Possibly as part of this project, despite their prose genre, they engage with the Latin text's form. As the detail from BML in figure two shows, the translated verses contain punctuation that does not correspond with natural syntactic breaks in the Italian. A partial transcription of Book One Meter One in the *volgarizzamento* as it appears in BML, preserving punctuation effects, reads:

Almeno queste scientie nostre
compangne nulla paura poté. Vincere
che non seguitassero la nostra via.
La gloria dela ben 'aventurata in qua die
tro gioventude verde. Consola ora
le 'venture di me dolente vecchio.
Perché la non pessata vecchiezza.
Et lo dolore vi comandò ad essere la
sua etade.¹³¹

¹²⁹ See Brunetti, "Guinizelli," 168-73 on the identification of the *volgarizzamento*'s author with the author of the vernacular *i Sillogismi di maestro Giandino da Carmignano* (BNCF MS Panciatichiano 67 f. 13v). This figure is described as "Giandino da Carmignanola maestro allo Studio" in Giovanni Villani's *Cronica*, where he is associated with events taking place in January 1284. Cf. Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. G. Porta (Parma, 1990), 557 (Book 8, chap. 95).

¹³⁰ The manuscript has been celebrated as evidence of the circulation of Guillaume de Conches' commentary in Tuscany in the *Duecento*: see Brunetti, "Guinizelli," 171.

¹³¹ BML 23 dext. 11, f. 4r. Here as elsewhere I follow the standards of Tognetti, *Criteri per la trascrizione di testi*. However in order to illustrate my argument, in all transcriptions from Boethius *volgarizzamenti*, I have left line divisions, capitalization, and punctuation as they appear in the manuscript.

At least these sciences, our companions no power could. Overcome so that they did not follow along our way. The glory of good fortune in flourishing youth. Consoles now the sad fate of me old man. Because unanticipated infirmity. And sorrow has commanded its age to be in me.¹³²

This punctuation appears to reflect the lineation of Boethius's Latin elegiac couplets. The Latin version of these lines as they appear in BML is as follows:

Has saltem nullus potuit peruincere terror.
Ne *nostrum* comites prosequerentur iter.
Gloria felicis olim viridisque iuvente.
Solantur mesti nunc mea facta senis.
Venit enim *properata* malis inoppi<n>a¹³³ senectus.
Et dolor etatem iussit inesse suam.¹³⁴

These [the Muses], at least, no terror could overcome.
So that they did not follow as companions on our way.
Once the glory of my happy and blooming youth.
They console now my fate of sad old age.
Infirmity came unforeseen, sped by evils.
And grief commanded old age to enter me.¹³⁵

The majuscules in the Italian translation correspond closely with the opening of each line of Latin. "La gloria," "Consola," and "Et lo dolore" all have their Latin equivalents—"Gloria," "Solantur," and "Et dolor." Furthermore, the content of each punctuated unit in the Italian roughly matches up with the Latin lines: "La gloria dela ben' aventurata in qua dietro gioventude verde" does not complete a sentence by modern standards, but it does correspond with the Latin line "Gloria felicis olim viridisque iuvente." This parallelism between Latin and Italian is not perfect. For example, the translator's placement of the phrase "nostre compagne" in close proximity to the pronoun it

¹³² My translation imitates the punctuation and capitalization of the Italian text.

¹³³ Manuscript has "inoppima."

¹³⁴ BML 23 dext. 11, f. 4r.

¹³⁵ My translation based on Watts, trans., *The Consolation of Philosophy*. I have imitated the manuscript's pointing at the end of each line.

modifies, “queste,” rearranges the material contained in the first two punctuated division of the vernacular translation. Yet even with these exceptions, the overall movement of the Italian punctuation recalls the arrangement of the Latin verse, embedding a memory of Boethius’s prosody in vernacular prose.

The purpose of this transcriptional practice is uncertain. It suits the bilingual layout of BML, facilitating movement between short, visually accessible units of both Latin and Italian. But the *volgarizzamento* may not have been originally composed as a marginal text. And just as in CUL li.1.38, divisions that recollect the Latin source also reflect thematic structures that survive in translation. For example, in the sentence “La gloria dela ben ’aventurata in qua dietro gioventude verde. Consola ora le venture di me dolente vecchio,” the BML scribe’s punctuation preserves the thematic break between past glory and present decrepitude, highlighting the syntactic contrast between “la gloria” and “le venture.” The vernacular translation itself inherits a thematic and syntactic arrangement from the Latin, which its punctuation amplifies.

Late in the *Trecento*, this punctuation becomes the basis for a new layout that underscores this *volgarizzamento*’s complex generic identity. By the early fourteenth century, Brunetti proposes, Maestro Giandino’s translation had already been filled out with translations of the prose sections and extended to the end of the *Consolation*. This is how it appears in Riccardiana 1609.¹³⁶ The end of the *Trecento* brings another copy of this translation: Riccardiana MS 1003 (Ric. 1003 from here forward). This manuscript has translations of both the *Consolation*’s prose and verse sections, but breaks off at

¹³⁶ Brunetti, “Preliminari,” 40.

Book Three, Prose Twelve. The position of the vernacular translation in Ricc. 1003 is reversed with respect to BML: the scribe copies the *volgarizzamento* in the center of the page and surrounds it with commentary.¹³⁷ Moreover, Ricc. 1003 adds a further innovation: the metrical sections of the text continue to be translated in prose, but have been arranged on the page as if they were verse, set out in distinct lines with indented run-on. The scribe bases this layout on the same punctuated divisions as those in BML. A transcription from Book One Meter One in Ricc. 1003 (figure three), preserving lineation effects, reads:

A lmeno queste scienze no
 stre compagne nula pau
 ra poté
 V incere che non seguitase la
 nostra via.
 L a gloria [sic] del bene avventurata
 in *qua* adietro gioventudine
 verde
 C honsola ora le 'venture di me
 dolente vechio
 P *er*ché la non pensata ve
 chieza.
 E lo dolore vi comandò ad e
 sere la sua etade.¹³⁸

This layout imitates the conventions of Latin verse not only by separating the translated passage into verses, but also by setting the first letter of each verse apart. Ricc. 1003 recognizes a formal memory of Boethius's Latin meter, rearticulates it on the page, and as a result, invents a layered generic identity for this translated meter. In contrast to CUL li.1.38, in Ricc. 1003, this layout is consistent throughout the manuscript. Its effects

¹³⁷ Brunetti, "Preliminari," 26.

¹³⁸ Ricc. MS 1003 f. 84v.

strike a complex balance between the autonomy of the vernacular and its reliance on the Latin. The vernacular is no longer relegated to the margins, and its prosimetric shape helps it stake its claim to the center of the page. But the vernacular is capable of this because its arrangement derives from the Latin. Its practical deficiencies in rhyme and meter serve as a reminder that the organization of these vernacular verses emerges from outside of the vernacular itself, articulating instead an echo of Latin metrics.

The conventions of Italian poetic transcription provide a possible explanation for the evolution of Maestro Giandino's *volgarizzamento*. The earliest known poem in the Italian vernacular, the *Cantico di Frate Sole* of St. Francis of Assisi (1224) is in its most authoritative manuscript (Assisi 338) copied as prose. Its metrical divisions are marked by majuscules and *puncti*.¹³⁹ Prose layout also appears in manuscripts of Italian poetry more closely contemporary with Maestro Giandino. Early Italian lyrics were copied in the margins of official Latin texts, where they were laid out as prose blocks, with individual verses marked by *puncti* or *puncti elevati*.¹⁴⁰ This layout persists into the *Trecento*, even once Italian poetry occupies the center of the page: Boccaccio himself uses prose layout for his glossed copy of Guido Cavalcanti's "Donna mi priega" in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Chigiano L. V. 176.¹⁴¹ The individual verse finally became the unit for the transcription of Italian lyric poetry only at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The innovative layout of Ricc. 1003, which dates to the end of the

¹³⁹ Giovanni Pozzi, "Il *Cantico di Frate Sole* di San Francesco" in *Letteratura italiana: Le opere*, vol. 1: Dalle Origini al Cinquecento (Milan 1992), 3-26, at 5-6.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. the overview of this situation and the specific comments on Boccaccio's copy of Cavalcanti in H. Wayne Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric* (New York, 1993), 28.

¹⁴¹ Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics*, 228.

fourteenth century, might therefore reflect not so much a new generic understanding of Boethius translation as new expectations for the appearance of verse on the page. In the context of early Italian transcriptional practices, even when laid out as prose in BML, Maestro Giandino's translation would have been susceptible to identification as poetry. Ricc. 1003 concretizes this possibility by using updated techniques of transcription to definitively differentiate verse from prose. From this perspective, Giandino's prose translation is associated not only with poetry, but with vernacular poetry. Although the divisions in the *volgarizzamento* derive from the Latin, their deployment on the page reflects specifically vernacular conventions for the transcription of poetry.

The verse layout of Ricc. 1003 might also reflect a different transcriptional practice, one both more Latinate and more closely associated with translation than Italian lyrics: the layout of the Vulgate Psalter. As M. B. Parkes explains, the basic parallelism that structures both the form and the content of Hebrew poetry survives in Jerome's Latin translation.¹⁴² The result is a translation organized into verses, with each verse subdivided into two parts. This structure was used to organize the performance of the Psalms and came to be identified with non-metrical verse. Early manuscripts of the Psalter were copied as prose, but as Parkes explains, once Jerome's translation was increasingly treated as verse, it was laid out with individual verses set on new lines and marked by *litterae nobiliores*. In fact, Parkes argues that the Latin Psalter influenced characteristically poetic modes of reading: "the practice of analysing a psalm verse according to the coincidence of sense and form stimulated readers to apply such analysis

¹⁴² M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), 103-105.

to other poetic texts.”¹⁴³ The Psalter could have influenced the scribe of Cambridge University Library Ii.1.38 as well, helping to explain the affinities between the English and Italian manuscripts. Together, both of the possible models for the *volgarizzamento*’s layout demonstrate the possibility of discovering latent formal memories in prose translation. Searching out these memories allows for the rearticulation of poetic form and the creation of unexpected generic and linguistic associations.

A stronger candidate than Ricc. 1003 for the direct influence of the Psalter may be a different Boethius *volgarizzamento* from the late fourteenth century. This translation survives in three copies: Biblioteca Riccardiana MS 1540, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Reginensis Latino 1971 (Reg. 1971 from here forward), and Biblioteca Corsiniana MS 44. D. 18.¹⁴⁴ All of these manuscripts contain an all-prose *volgarizzamento* of the *Consolation* accompanied by a *volgarizzamento* of Nicholas Trevet’s commentary on Boethius, perhaps by the same translator. In this discussion, I will concentrate on Reg. 1971, a manuscript that declares its participation in learned, academic tradition from its opening folio. There, a figure probably representing Trevet himself, recognizable from his black and white Dominican apparel, appears in the

¹⁴³ Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, 105.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Albesano, *Consolatio Philosophiae volgare*, 47. Albesano lists these three manuscripts and explains that Reg. 1971 contains a different redaction of the *Consolation* translation from Ricc. 1540. However, she claims incorrectly that Corsiniana MS 44. D. 18 only contains Trevet’s commentary; it actually has a *Consolation* translation as well. As Albesano notes, there is also a fourth manuscript of the Trevet translation, the lost Berlin Preussische Staatsbibliothek, MS ital. fol. 174. On the translation of Trevet’s commentary, see Otto Löhmann, “Boethius und sein Kommentator Nicolaus Trevet in der italienischen Literatur des 14. Jahrhunderts” in Peter Schweigler, ed., *Bibliothekswelt und Kulturgeschichte: Eine internationale Festgabe für Joachim Wieder zum 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von seinen Freunden* (Munich, 1977), 28-48.

illustrated letter that begins the commentator's prologue (figure four).¹⁴⁵ Having taken its beginning with Trevet, the manuscript goes on to create an impression of value and prestige by means of elaborate illustrated initials beginning each book of the *Consolation*.

In Reg. 1971, the project of creating an elaborate, authoritative vernacular *Consolation* extends to treating the manuscript's all-prose translation as a convincing stand in for Boethian prosimetrum. As in Ricc. 1003, the prose translations of Boethius's *metra* have all been laid out as verse. But in some cases, the translator also preserves the organization of Boethius's specific metrical forms. Book One Meter One, for example, is not only copied as verse, but also marked off in couplets corresponding with Boethian elegiacs (figure five: note that this image does not depict the same passage as that transcribed below). Paraphs organize the translation into sets of two lines:

¶A l meno queste nulla paura vincere poté.
C he elle *compagne non seguissero* il *nostro* viaggio.
¶Q uelle *gloria* della *adventurata* giovanezza.
O ra consolano le sventure di me doloroso vecchio.
¶P erciò ke *non pensata vekieza afrectata* co' mali è venuta.
E t il dolor a comando ke la sua eta sia *in* me.¹⁴⁶

¶At least these no fear could overcome.
So that they did not follow as companions on our journey.
¶They the glory of fortunate youth.
Now console the misfortune of me a sorrowful old man.
¶For unforeseen infirmity is come hastened by evils.
And sorrow has commanded that its age be in me.

This nuanced system of organization calls attention to more than rough units of thematic or syntactic information. Rather, it arranges those units into an overall scheme that

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Dean, "The Dedication," 595 for a description of a similar image in a Latin manuscript of Trevet's commentary.

¹⁴⁶ BAV Reg. Lat. MS 1971 f. 2v.

captures the essential rise and fall of elegiac verse. The first two lines of this passage open with the bravery of the Muses, only to conclude with the sorrowful journey of the speaker. The next two contrast the Muses' role as the glory of youth with their current state, consoling sorrowful old age. This layout does not merely gesture towards the divisions of verse: it begins to integrate them into a larger formal and thematic structure.

Reg. 1971's accompanying commentary advances this interpretive work by assigning specific hermeneutical significance to the form of the translated meter. In general, the *volgarizzatore* of Trevet's commentary is attentive to the interpretive losses incurred in translating the *Consolation*. Trevet's word-by-word analyses have often been condensed or left out, and the explanations of metrical form that begin his comments on each poem have typically been completely omitted. However, the commentary's translator does make one exception: he includes Trevet's metrical analysis of Book One Meter One, which explains the formal and thematic structure of elegiac couplets:

Et è senpre il primo verso di sei piedi & il secondo di cinque. Et sempre il *secondo* compie la *sententia* del primo. Et questo si confa molto a *miseri* impercio ke si come qui si comincia la *sententia* in verso *perfecto* & terminasi in *imperfecto*. Così il lamentevole parlare de *miseri* con uno isforzo si comincia da *perfectione* & da vigore. & verso la fine *indebolisce* & viene meno.¹⁴⁷

And the first verse is always six feet, and the second five. And the second always completes the *sententia* of the first. And this conforms well to the unfortunate, insofar as the *sententia* begins in a complete verse and ends in an incomplete one, just as the complaining speech of the miserable begins from perfection and vigor, and towards the end weakens and diminishes.

In comparison, Trevet's Latin reads:

Constat huius metrum primo versu dactilico exametro, secundo vero dactilico pentametro qui semper est terminatus sententie versus prioris. et hoc ualde

¹⁴⁷ BAV Reg. Lat. MS 1971 f. 2r.

congruit miseris. sicut enim hoc metro sententia inchoatur versu perfecto ita sermo querulus miserorum incipit ex quadam uicina perfectione et uigore sed uersus facultatem debilitatur et deficit.¹⁴⁸

This meter consists of a first verse of dactylic hexameter and a second of dactylic pentameter, which always finishes the *sententia* of the first. And this corresponds well with misery. Indeed, just as in this meter the *sententia* departs from a complete verse, so the complaining speech of the miserable begins from virtual perfection and vigor but continuing, it weakens and depletes its strength.

The translated commentary omits the technical reference to dactyls, but retains two basic notions: that elegiac couplets rely on a relationship of proportion, and that their effect derives from the contrast between the first line of each couplet and the second. The translator of the commentary might well have considered the *volgarizzamento*'s version of elegiac couplets sufficient to illustrate these points. On the one hand, the specific metrical relationships that Trevet describes are, for the most part, lost in the prose translation of the meter. But on the other, by performing a formal rebeginning every other line, the paraphs invite the reader to discover elegiac structure within the prose translation. For example, in the lines “¶Quelle gloria della adventurata giovanezza. / Ora consolano le sventure di me doloroso vecchio,” the weakening speech of the miserable might be found in the echoing assonance on “o” in the second part of the sentence. Poetic form becomes at once the object of rediscovery and of invention, as the search for old poetry leads to the invention of new. Although Reg. 1971 limits these formal comments to Book One Meter One, they illustrate the fullest realization of the layout I have explored in this section: a vernacular translation that develops its own organization, and

¹⁴⁸ Silk, *Cambridge Manuscript II* 3.21, 558.

thereby its own formal, generic and hermeneutical significance, from the discovery and rearticulation of echoes of its Latin source.

It is precisely this action—the rediscovery of poetic form in translation—that structures *Troilus*'s engagement with concepts of order, governance, and determinism. In the invocation to Book Three of *Troilus*, the passage with which this chapter began, the poem's narrator invokes Love as a force organizing the activity of the natural world. Although Love's full power is difficult to see, the narrator insists that if humans could know it, they would understand events that seem random and inexplicable. As explained earlier, the Book Three invocation is based on Troilo's song to Venus from Book Three of *Il Filostrato*, sung after the consummation of the love affair. When Chaucer reaches the corresponding moment in his narrative, he turns to Boccaccio's source text, Book Two, Meter Eight of the *Consolation*, producing a translation that reiterates and intensifies the desire for a comprehensive, ordering power of love.¹⁴⁹ The passage, often rubricated *Canticus Troili* (the second such *canticus* in the poem), begins with Troilus asserting Love's universal governance and ends with him calling upon God to bind and fix the hearts of lovers.¹⁵⁰

Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce,
Love, that with his hestes hath in hevene hye,
Love, that with an holsom alliaunce
Halt peples joyned, as hym lest hem gye,

¹⁴⁹ See Mark J. Gleason, "Nicholas Trevet, Boethius, Boccaccio: Contexts of Cosmic Love in *Troilus*, Book III," *Medievalia et humanistica* n.s. 15 (1987): 161-188, for the argument that both in the invocation and in the Book Three *Canticus* Chaucer grants the chain of love a scope and causal power significantly exceeding that which Trevet gives it.

¹⁵⁰ The second *Canticus Troilii* does not appear in some manuscripts of the poem. Cf. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 38-39 on the question of whether the *Canticus* was an authorial revision.

Love, that knetteth lawe of compaignie,
And couples doth in vertu for to dwelle,
Bynd this acord, that I have told and telle.

That, that the world with feith which that is stable
Diverseth so his stowndes concordynge,
That elementz that ben so discordable
Holden a bond perpetuely durynge,
That Phebus mote his rosy day forth brynge,
And that the mone hath lordshipe over the nyghtes:
Al this doth Love, ay heried be his myghtes!

So wolde God, that auctour is of kynde,
That with his bond Love of his vertu liste
To cerclen hertes alle and faste bynde,
That from his bond no wight the wey out wiste.
And hertes colde, hem wolde I that he twiste
To make hem love, and that hem liste ay rewe
On hertes sore, and kepe hem that ben trewe!
(III.1744-71)

Troilus seems to be asking for his own love affair—and all love affairs—to participate in the order that binds the natural world and renders it comprehensible. This is a significant recontextualization of the Boethian material. In the *Consolation*, Book Two Meter Eight asserts that the love that orders the natural world lies behind chaste bonds of married love, but also concludes with a lament that human affairs do not necessarily follow the orderly regulation of the natural world. Troilus, in contrast, seeks an overarching order capable of concretizing his love affair and removing it from time and change. His desire for a bond from which “no wight the wey out wiste” approaches an appeal to determinism.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Cf. Jill Mann’s account of *Troilus* protagonists’ desire for control in *Troilus*: Jill Mann, “Chance and Destiny in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Knight’s Tale*,” in Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, U.K., 2003).

Although Chaucer does not draw explicit connections between literary order and the order that Troilus seeks in love, his source text does. Boethius's Book Two, Meter Eight uses its orderly poetic form to perform a disclosure of the universal governance that it describes. The complete poem, together with Chaucer's prose translation in *Boece*, reads,

Quod mundus stabili fide	
Concordes variat vices,	
Quod pugnancia semina	
Fedus perpetuum tenent	
Quod Phebus roseum diem	5
Curru proveit aureo,	
Ut quas duxerit Hesperus	
Phebe noctibus imperet,	
Ut fluctus avidum mare	
Certo fine coherceat,	10
Ne terris liceat vagis	
Latos tendere terminos,	
Hanc rerum seriem ligat	
Terras ac pelagus regens	
Et celo imperitans amor.	15
Hic si frena remiserit,	
Quicquid nunc amat invicem	
Bellum continuo geret	
Et quam nunc socia fide	
Pulcris motibus incitant,	20
Certent solvere machinam.	
Hic sancto populos quoque	
Iunctos federe continet,	
Hic et coniugium sacrum	
Castis nectit amoribus,	25
Hic fidis eciam sua	
Dictat iura sodalibus	
O felix hominum genus	
Si vestros animos amor	
Quo celum regitur regat.	30

That the world with stable feyth varieth accordable chaungynges; that the contrarious qualites of elementz holden among hemself allyaunce perdurable; that Phebus, the sonne, with his goldene chariet bryngeth forth the rosene day; that the

moone hath comaundement over the nyghtes, which nyghtes Esperus, the eve-sterre, hath brought; that the see, gredy to flowen, constreyneth with a certein eende his floodes, so that it is nat leweful to strecche his brode termes or bowndes uppon the erthes (that is to seyn, to coveren al the erthe)—al this accordaunce [and] ordenaunce of thynges is bounde with love, that governeth erthe and see, and hath also comandement to the hevene. And yif this love slakede the bridelis, alle thynges that now loven hem togidres wolden make batayle contynuely, and stryven to fordo the fassoun of this world, the which they now leden in accordable feith by fayre moevynges. This love halt togidres peples joyned with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrament of mariages of chaste loves; and love enditeth lawes to trewe felawes. O weleful were mankynde yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede yowr corages.

This remarkable poem transforms the act of reading into a discovery of the structure that lies behind the natural world. Boethius intimates order through the repetition of substantive clauses in the poem's first half, which he amplifies through anaphora on "quod" and "ut." The reader's gradual comprehension of the sentence's grammar reflects the extent to which the poem's order, like love's law, is spread out in time and space, and at any given point, it can only be glimpsed in part. The poem's long opening period suggests the unfolding of a plan in history, one whose origins only become clear with the arrival of the period's grammatical subject, *amor*, at the end of line fifteen of thirty, the poem's dead center.¹⁵² But even with an overall perspective on the poem's grammatical organization, the actual origin of this order remains elusive. On the one hand, "amor," the subject of the opening sentence, emerges as the subject that governs the poem's grammar, a formal metaphor for the binding power of love.¹⁵³ On the other, the poem's

¹⁵² Cf. Eleanor Johnson's comments on the ability of Boethius's *metra* to disrupt prose narrative and manipulate, or "aestheticize" time. Eleanor Johnson, "Chaucer and the Consolation of Prosimetrum," *Chaucer Review* 43 (2009): 455-72.

¹⁵³ Whether "amor" itself is a metaphor in Boethius's meter or an actual metaphysical presence has been a subject of debate. See David S. Chamberlain, "The Philosophy of

arrangement has a second, more abstract origin in the rules of grammar and meter that it merely manifests.

Chaucer's translation of Boethius's *metrum* carries out the same basic process as do the scribes of the *volgarizzamenti* described above: it discovers memories of Latin form in prose translation and uses layout—as well as, in this case, rhyme and meter—to rearticulate them on the page. As Rita Copeland shows, Chaucer uses *Boece*, quoted above, to accomplish the Boethius translation in *Troilus*.¹⁵⁴ Christopher Cannon, who analyzes these lines at length, notes that *Boece* uses a similar syntax to that of Jean de Meun's French translation, one that preserves the order of Boethius's sentence and its repetitive substantive clauses.¹⁵⁵ Thus the *Boece* passage opens with a series of subordinate clauses beginning with "that," Chaucer's equivalent for "quod." In *Troilus*'s verse translation, Chaucer retains these parallel subordinate clauses, though he moves them to the second part of the poem. But verse layout allows for a new development. In *Troilus*, Chaucer aligns the beginning of each subordinate clause with the beginning of a metrical line. As Cannon puts it, the major difference between the prose translation and the meter is, essentially, verse layout itself: "the breaks the *canticus* introduces into the syntax of the *metrum* [the prose translation] have clarifying effect, for they throw each important constituent of the period into prominent position."¹⁵⁶ The *canticus* rearticulates

Music in the *Consolatio* of Boethius," *Speculum* 45 (1970): 80-97; and Gerard O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*, (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991), 150. *Troilus* himself appears to be searching for a metaphysical power, though he also appears uncertain over precisely what to call it.

¹⁵⁴ Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 143-45

¹⁵⁵ Cannon, *The Making*, 21-37.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

metrical divisions that coincide with the organization of *Boece*'s long period—organization that recalls the original Boethian poem. Or as Cannon writes, Chaucer “rediscovers the original syntactic structure of the clauses as [the *canticus*] again adapts grammar to verse form.”¹⁵⁷

By coupling this formal act of rediscovery with a desperate thematic search for order, Chaucer transforms Boethius's gradual uncovering of order into Troilus's eager, even jealous, invocation of it. Troilus begins his song with the word “Love,” and it is this term that defines the poem's opening anaphora:

Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce,
Love, that with his hestes hath in hevene hye,
Love, that with an holsom alliaunce

The tripartite repetition of the term “Love” recalls the three *terzine* of *Inferno* V in which Francesca makes her case to Dante, three times citing the power of Love. Like Troilus, Francesca imagines a Love that forcibly arranges relationships in accordance with its own law: “Amor, ch' a nullo amato amar perdona” (“Love, which pardons no one loved from loving in return”) (*Inf.* V.103). Troilus, who calls out to Love rather than discovering it, imagines the presence of a causal force similar to that which Francesca describes.

Accordingly, Chaucer rearranges Boethius's slow revelation of formal order so that Troilus bursts forth in the invocation of the very term—Love—that Boethius gradually discloses over fifteen lines. The suggestive “quod” clauses that structure the beginning of Boethius's *metrum* thus arrive in the second stanza of the *canticus*, once Troilus has

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

already insisted on the ordering power of love. And yet by the conclusion of the *canticus*, the actual object of Troilus's invocation has shifted. He asks,

So wolde God, that auctour is of kynde,
That with his bond Love of his vertu liste
To cerclen hertes alle and faste bynde,
That from his bond no wight the wey out wiste.
(III.1765-68)

Love has by this point become a bond wielded by God rather than the personified figure of stanza one. Although the *Riverside Chaucer* retains continuity between the first and last stanzas by capitalizing "Love," there is no textual reason to attribute such consistency to the prayer. It is as if in his search for a source of binding order, Troilus constantly reimagines what it might look like, trying to see beyond representation to its "auctour." Yet the shape that his imagining takes is firmly grounded in literary history, relying on the form of older texts. As Chaucer's protagonist looks back to God, Chaucer's verse looks back to Boethius's *metrum* and finds its order there. The *canticus*'s form thus represents a significant check on the desire for permanence and transcendence that it articulates. By deriving the structure of the *canticus* from an older text, Chaucer historicizes the very language with which Troilus anticipates and invokes the timeless and changeless power of love.

Does prose represent an alternative to this entrapment within the history of literary form? Poetry, which appeals to explicit rules of rhyme and meter, calls attention to particular historical conventions and particular moments in the development of vernacular languages. Prose, on the other hand, ostensibly dedicates itself to the expression of meaning alone. In the *Consolation*, prose is the language of serious

philosophical work. Chaucer explores this binary in *Troilus* Book Four, where Troilus again seeks out a binding universal order—in this case, a divine plan that could account for the loss of Criseyde. This time, Chaucer draws on Boethian prose, translating a knotty exposition of the relationship between fate and free will from Book Five Prose Three of the *Consolation*. Yet, as the passage unfolds, *Troilus* resists the notion that even Boethius’s prose is a transparent medium for the translation of meaning, for the passage unfolds as a struggle to accommodate one form to another. The process of transforming prose into verse in this passage generates a profusion of filler, including empty words like “ywis,” “forsothe,” and “this” (IV.1034, 1035, 1032). An entire line is taken up with the remarkable phrase, “And further over now ayeynward yit,” which Howard Patch paraphrases as “beside, notwithstanding the point, however” (IV.1027).¹⁵⁸

This poetic filler tends to occupy line-endings, creating the opposite effect to that of the *canticus*: disjuncture between formal, syntactic, and thematic points of emphasis.

One stanza employs no end-stopped lines at all:

But now n'enforce I me nat in shewynge
 How the ordre of causes stant; but wel woot I
 That it byhoveth that the byfallynge
 Of thynges wist byfore certeynly
 Be necessarie, al seme it nat therby
 That prescience put fallynge necessaire
 To thyng to come, al falle it foule or faire.
 (IV.1016-22)

¹⁵⁸ Howard R. Patch, “Troilus on Predestination,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 17.3 (Jul., 1918): 399-422, at 417. Patch does not read these lines as concessions to translation at all, rather interpreting them as part of an “outburst of human emotion” (405).

The long lines wrapping around this stanza reflect the pressure of prose on poetry. The origins of these lines are in *Boece*, which renders this passage,

But I ne enforce me nat now to schewen it, that the bytidynge of thingis iwyst
byforn is necessarie, how so or in what manere that the ordre of causes hath itself;
although that it ne seme naught that prescience bringe in necessite of bytydinge to
thinges to comen.

(5p3.47-53)

Boethius's Latin:

Ac non illud demonstrare nitamur, quoquo modo se habeat ordo causarum,
necessarium esse eventum prescitarum rerum etsi prescientia futuris rebus
eveniendi necessitatem non videatur inferre.

(5p3.22-25)

The long phrase extending through the third and fourth lines of the passage in *Troilus* derives from the need to spell out information compressed into Boethius's "eventum prescitarum rerum." The prose renders the genitive as a prepositional phrase, and it translates "prescitarum" with two words. The result is verbose and remains almost the same in the prose and the verse. Even more challenging is the final sentence, where *Boece* renders the dative "futuris rebis" by using another prepositional phrase, and translates "inferre" literally as "bringe in." While the verse translation does away with the wordy "bringe in," it retains the prepositional phrase, leaving it hanging awkwardly at the beginning of the seventh line. These lines witness an agonistic relationship between the original text, mediated through English prose, and the receiving form. But despite, or perhaps because of its failings, the passage suggests a kind of poetic prowess. It performs translation between radically different discourses, calling attention both to the expressive capacity of Chaucer's poetry and to the presence of his complex prose source.

At the same time that Chaucer's verse registers the pressures of its Boethian origins, Troilus himself attributes his entire philosophical struggle to other peoples' discourse. He recognizes that he is dealing with arguments already set out by clerks, asking himself, "allas, whom shal I leeve? / For ther ben grete clerkes many oon / That destyne thorough argumentes preve" (IV.967-69). The problem, as he articulates it, is not merely the difficulty of the philosophical dilemma, but the difficulty of clerical discourse: "so sleighe arn clerkes olde / That I not whos opynyon I may holde" (IV.972-73). Despite his overt concern for fate and freewill, Troilus's investigations are not limited by fate so obviously as by older forms. The very possibility of imagining a perspective outside of time emerges, for Troilus, within the historical world of clerkly discourse.

This tangle of language, which seemingly denies Troilus access to direct understanding, reflects Lee Patterson's sense that *Troilus and Criseyde* represents a "world of mediation, of replicated acts that foreclose the quest for either beginning or end."¹⁵⁹ For Patterson, this structure constitutes a critique of the *Consolation* itself:

Boethianism offers to its believers the knowledge of a *fons et origo* that is not only itself unmediated but identical with the 'oon ende of blisfulnesse' to which man's *intentio naturalis* instinctively converts him. Yet for all their striving, not only does this consoling vision finally elude the poem's protagonists, but the terms of its relationship to the historical world requires that it should. Invoked throughout the poem by an elaborate set of allusions, Boethianism functions not as a mode of being available to them and willfully ignored, but as a norm of judgment that stands outside and apart from a historical world it weighs in the balance and finds wanting.¹⁶⁰

Patterson responds powerfully to a practice of reading the poem, strongly inflected by exegetical criticism, that critiques the protagonists' actions against a Boethian

¹⁵⁹ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject*, 152.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 152-53.

standard.¹⁶¹ But in registering the impossibility of “Boethianism,” Patterson retains the assumption that the *Consolation* itself represents, for Chaucer, a unified program for happiness, reducible to a single word. I would disagree: Chaucer’s reception of Boethius consistently engages with the *Consolation*’s specific literary and discursive characteristics. His borrowings from Boethius’s text do not simply refer to abstract representations of a purely conceptual system: rather, they reference forms. Translating different parts of the *Consolation* allows Chaucer to signal *Troilus*’s textual history, to register the presence of different types of discourse that inflect the poem’s versification.¹⁶² The poetry that Chaucer generates from this interaction reveals specific ways in which the past, in the form of texts and discourse, defines and interprets the possibilities open to philosophical and poetic progress.

This is not to say that Chaucer simply accepts a determinism of the present by the past, subordinating his own poetic form to that of his predecessors. The *Canticus Troili*, which reverses the process of disclosure structuring Boethius’s “Quod mundus stabili fide,” alters the original hymn in the very process of appealing to its order and structure. Chaucer casts both the *Canticus* and the Book Four rumination on fate and free will into the voice of prayer. In the latter case, Troilus completely ignores the consequences of determinism by asking Jove for help:

Almyghty Jove in trone
That woost of al thys thyng the soothfastnesse,

¹⁶¹ See for example D. W. Robertson, Jr., “Chaucerian Tragedy.” *ELH* 19 (1952): 1-37.

¹⁶² Critics of the *Consolation* itself have questioned the extent to which Boethius himself intended a complete, coherent philosophy. See John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford, 2003), 146-63 for a review of criticism. Cf. also Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*, 236 on the inadequacy of language at the *Consolation*’s conclusion.

Rewe on my sorwe: or do me deyen sone,
Or bryng Criseyde and me fro this destresse.
(IV.1079-82)

In the same breath that he grants Jove full foreknowledge of “al this thyng,” Troilus asks for various possible futures: pity, death, or the continuance of the love affair. As I have argued, Boethius’s poetry tends to structure the ways in which *Troilus* imagines transcendence and permanence. But at the same time, in the very process of imagining the transcendent, *Troilus*’s reappropriations of the *Consolation* cast Boethian forms into newly hypothetical contexts, where they encounter alternative conceptual and literary possibilities. Thus, for example, the form of Boethius’s Book Two Meter Eight becomes conflated with the form of Francesca’s tripartite appeal to Love. Thomas Stillinger proposes that in *Troilus*, “history is the space of difference between the Chaucerian narrator and the Chaucerian protagonists, and the space of difference between Chaucer and his readers.”¹⁶³ History might also be described as the difference between Chaucer and Boethius, a space that *Troilus* anatomizes. Chaucer’s translations of the *Consolation* reflect more than simply Troilus’s failure to evade change; they might also be described as a dissection of how literary change takes place through an ongoing engagement with the past.

Chaucer concludes *Troilus* with both a prayer and another borrowing. Perhaps the most formally coherent translation in *Troilus* is the *terzina* from *Paradiso* that Chaucer includes in his poem’s final stanza. In this passage, the poem makes a final attempt to describe a transcendent, all-encompassing perspective:

¹⁶³ Stillinger, *The Song of Troilus: Lyric Authority in the Medieval Book* (Philadelphia, 1992), 206.

Thow oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve,
That regnest ay in thre, and two, and oon,
Uncircumscrip, and al maist circumscribe.
(V.1863-65)

Chaucer derives these lines, which he preserves in strict formal detail, from Dante's

Paradiso:

Quell' uno e due e tre che sempre vive
e regna sempre in tre e 'n due e 'n uno
non circunscriitto, e tutto circunscrive.
(*Par.* 14.28-30)

That One and Two and Three that ever lives
And always reigns in Three and Two and One,
Not circumscribed, but circumscribing all things.

Chaucer appropriates from Dante the numeric chiasmus that lends this passage its sense of completeness and closure. He retains the caesura in the final line, a pause that enhances the contrast between the circumscription of worldly life and the completeness of the divine perspective. But he alters the performative context of the passage. In

Paradiso, these lines form part of a song of praise among already saved souls. In *Troilus*, they express the unfulfilled desire for salvation. The stanza concludes,

Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende, and to thy mercy, everichon,
So make us, Jesus, for thi mercy, digne,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne.
(V.1866-69)

These final lines describe divine governance that begins and ends with itself. They express the paradox of salvation: to be "digne" of "thy mercy" the sinner relies on the assistance of "thi mercy." As the repetition suggests, language collapses in the attempt to describe the relationship between the creator and creation. Nevertheless, throughout the

poem Chaucer draws on older texts in order to imagine and to invoke this relationship.

By anatomizing such efforts, *Troilus* reveals literary history taking place in and through poetry's attempts to escape time and change.

CHAPTER THREE

Founding Forms: Andrea Lancia's *Eneide*, *Decameron* 5.9, and *The Wife of Bath's Tale*

"Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne, / To lyven vertuously and weyve synne"
(III.1175-76). The loathly lady of *The Wife of Bath's Tale* summarizes her lecture on *gentillesse* with this elegant couplet. The hag argues that our family background does not matter: every person has the opportunity to become noble through virtue. Indeed, even personal history can be cast aside in the moment that one begins to live well. Such formulations insist that ethical nobility easy to identify and interpret, for it exists independently of one's familial history and obligations. But *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, even as it makes this argument, is concerned with contingency: Chaucer's literary precursors, along with concerns about Lollardy, impinge upon the *Tale's* form. As Maura Nolan writes, "a meaningful historicism is also a kind of formalism, a craft of reading and writing about texts."¹⁶⁴ What relationship do the complexities of literary and historical context have to the textual forms used to advance ethical readings of nobility? In this chapter, I will consider this question across a triptych of texts: Andrea Lancia's *Aeneid* translation, Boccaccio's *Decameron* 5.9, and *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Each of these texts maintains an ambivalent relationship between the interpretive clarity

¹⁶⁴ Maura Nolan, "Historicism After Historicism," 83. Cf. Peggy A. Knapp, "Varieties of Medieval Historicism," *Chaucer Yearbook* 1 (1992): 157-75, which compares the Wife of Bath's historicizing to that of medievalist critics; as Knapp observes, "the Wife understands [. . .] that the potentialities of a story are somehow dependent on its milieu" (157).

associated with ethical reading and the dense, evocative potential of vernacular poetic form.

Italian efforts to reconcile ethical nobility with pride in the city's Roman connections provide comparative perspective on the difficulty of making the past ethically interpretable. One of the two earliest Italian *Aeneid* translations, that by Florentine notary Andrea Lancia (written *circa* 1316-1322), ostensibly promotes Roman history as a source of ethical exempla. Yet Lancia struggles to let go of diachronic and genealogical readings of history; even as he advocates an exemplary reading of the past, he affirms specific lines of descent from Rome to Florence. Lancia's translation uses form to advance interpretive clarity, simplifying and paraphrasing much of the *Aeneid*. But again, it also reveals this practice to be complicated by contradictory impulses. Even as he streamlines Virgil, Lancia takes the opportunity to deploy lines of Dante's poetry. The translation gains depth and nuance, and its readers appear at times to have attended less to its ethical meaning than to its form.

The fissures within Andrea Lancia's interpretation of the Roman past inform the intense contradictions in Boccaccio's depiction of a past reinterpreted, the story of Federigo degli Alberighi in *Decameron* 5.9. Boccaccio attributes Federigo's story to Andrea Lancia's own patron, Coppo di Borghese degli Domenichi. Boccaccio depicts Federigo casting aside his own noble past and, in the process, gaining a new wife and a new fortune. Federigo's virtue becomes interpretable through his sacrifice of his own history, and Fiammetta encourages the ladies in the *brigata* to read potential lovers in the same light. Yet the novella resists such interpretive simplicity both in its elements of

fantasy and in its intense nostalgia for an earlier age. Virtue does not emerge as the novella's primary object of desire; the Florentine past does.

The Wife of Bath's Tale also turns to an earlier age with a sense of desire and nostalgia, and does so in the name of interpretive clarity. The *Tale's* romance landscape is inaugurated as a source of simplicity, with modern architecture—and modern Friars—peeled away. In the hag's lecture on nobility, the fantasy of the past as undeveloped space is frequently mirrored by a clearing away of complexity at the level of lexicon and syntax as well. Yet predictably, outcroppings of complex thematic and formal buildings appear almost immediately. The process culminates in the lecture on *gentillesse*, poverty, and old age. The hag argues for stripping away historicity and reading individuals based on virtue alone, an argument that manifests itself in a repetitive lexicon insistent upon its truth and transparency. However, this is also a passage in which Chaucer takes the opportunity to integrate lines of Dante's *Commedia* and to cross citational paths with *Piers Plowman*, generating new, digressive directions for the lecture as he does so. The *Tale's* form resists its own regressive simplification; as soon as Chaucer pares away the effects of time and change, they develop once again.

Andrea Lancia's *Aeneid* translation seizes upon the opportunity to celebrate Florence in as many ways as possible. Its sheer variety of approaches creates a testing ground for exploring the frictions between them. The very project of translating Virgil itself may have been partially motivated by Dante's success in the vernacular. Lancia's was the second Italian *Aeneid* translation. The first, by Ciampolo Ugurgieri di Siena, was

probably completed between 1312 and 1316. Lancia's followed it (in fact, it appears to be partly based on Ciampolo's translation) and was probably completed by 1316; certainly by 1322.¹⁶⁵ The *terminus post quem* for both of these *volgarizzamenti* derives from the publication of *Purgatorio*, for as Giulia Valerio notes, both translators appear to have known the poem, drawing on it to translate key moments in Virgil's text.¹⁶⁶ Valerio proposes that Dante's achievement gave Ciampolo the confidence to put Virgil's language into Italian, a choice that subsequently influenced Andrea.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, both translators had a strong interest in Dante's legacy. Valerio explains that Ciampolo's brother, Cecco, was the author of a commentary on the *Commedia*, of a *terza rima* poem recapitulating its contents, and the *canzone* beneath Ambrogio Lorenzetti's famous fresco *L'Allegoria ed Effetti del Buono e del Cattivo Governo* in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico. Cecco also authored a "cantilena," not yet edited, containing multiple references to the *Commedia*.¹⁶⁸

As for Andrea Lancia, his *Eneide* came early in a career that involved the promotion both of Dante's poetry and of the Florentine vernacular. Lancia has long been identified as the author of the *Ottimo Commento* on the *Commedia*.¹⁶⁹ More recent

¹⁶⁵ On Lancia's revised date of birth (around 1297), see Luca Azzetta, *Per la biografia di Andrea Lancia: Documenti e autografi*, *Italia medievale e umanistica* 39 (1996): 121-170 at 126. On the attribution of the *volgarizzamento* to Lancia, cf. Zaggia, *Heroides*, 17, which notes that the first manuscripts crediting Lancia with the translation are from the 1370s.

¹⁶⁶ Giulia Valerio, "La cronologia dei primi volgarizzamenti dell'*Eneide* e la diffusione della *Commedia*," *Medioevo romanzo* 10 (1985): 3-18, at 15.

¹⁶⁷ Valerio, "La cronologia," 18.

¹⁶⁸ Valerio, "La cronologia," 4-5.

¹⁶⁹ The manuscripts are Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magliabechiano conv. Sopp. I 1, 30 and Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, n. 4776. Cf. Saverio Bellomo,

research has shown him to be the creator of a separate series of glosses on the *Commedia* contained in a Florentine manuscript.¹⁷⁰ Luca Azzetta has suggested that this new identification should encourage us to rethink Lancia's authorship of the *Ottimo Commento*. But as he notes, both sets of commentary share several key characteristics: personal knowledge of Dante or of people who knew him, attention to minor works including *Convivio* and the Epistle to Can Grande, attention to the poem's literal level and its poetics, and a tendency to "spiegare Dante con Dante"—to gloss Dante using his own works, as Azzetta puts it.¹⁷¹ As Azzetta explains, Lancia was steeped in Dante's poetry; it "salted his blood."¹⁷² However, Lancia's promotion of the vernacular also extended beyond Dante. He produced vernacular translations of Seneca's *Epistulae ad Lucilium* and the Augustinian *Enarrationes in Psalmos*.¹⁷³ In 1355, he was assigned the translation of the *Ordinamenti, provvisioni, e riformagioni del Comune di Firenze* into the vernacular.¹⁷⁴ Lancia has also been credited, sometimes tenuously, with numerous other translations, including those of Ovid's *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*.¹⁷⁵ Saverio Bellomo proposes that Lancia recognized and promoted both the aesthetic and

"Primi Appunti sull' "Ottimo Commento" dantesco," *Giornale storico della letteratura Italiana* 157 (1980): 369-82 at 373.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Luca Azzetta, "Le chiose alla *Commedia* di Andrea Lancia, *L'epistola a Cangrande* e altre questioni dantesche" *L'Alighieri* 44 (2003): 5-73.

¹⁷¹ Azzetta, "Le chiose," 55-56.

¹⁷² Azzetta, "Le chiose," 33.

¹⁷³ Cf. Zaggia, *Heroides*, 22 which cites these two attributions as probable.

¹⁷⁴ Zaggia, *Heroides*, 21.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Azzetta, "Per la biografia," 131-33 on the need to reconsider these attributions. See also Bellomo, "Primi appunti," 374 on the proliferation of attributions to Lancia. Bellomo cites Marchesi's observation: "al nome di Lancia si ricorre."

the practical potential of the vernacular; that his civic duties and his literary interests were united in defense of the vernacular.¹⁷⁶

Translation of the *Aeneid* presented Lancia with the opportunity to think not only about the vernacular, but also about Florence's political and genealogical past. Lancia's patron appears to have been Coppo di Borghese degli Domenichi; in five of its manuscripts, the translation addresses itself to a "Coppo."¹⁷⁷ Coppo was known as an avid collector of both oral and written history, with interests ranging from contemporary events in Florence to the city's ancient origins.¹⁷⁸ He even appears as a character in one of Franco Sacchetti's *Trecentonovelle*, where he reads his (vernacularized) Livy with such enthusiasm and identification that the audacious habits of Roman women send him into a rage.¹⁷⁹ Rome mattered to Florentine readers because it was seen as the origin of the city's best qualities. Dante, for example, relies on the rhetoric of bloodlines as he reflects on the roots of Florence and Fiesole:

Faccian le bestie fiesolane strame
di lor medesme, e non tocchin la pianta,
s'alcuna surge ancora in lor letame,
in cui riviva la sementa santa
di que' Roman che vi rimaser quando
fu fatto il nido di malizia tanta.
(Inf. 15.73-78)

¹⁷⁶ Bellomo, "Primi appunti," 381-382.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Zaggia, *Heroides*, 17. More precisely, four manuscripts address themselves to "Coppo" (these are mss. II.II.60, II.II.62, and II.II.311, and Madrileno of the Biblioteca Centrale Nazionale in Florence.) One manuscript has "Coppo Milliorati" (BNCF Palatino 646.).

¹⁷⁸ Francesco Bruni, "La proiezione dell'attualità politica sul passato: Note su cronisti, narratori, commentatori, della *Commedia* del XIV secolo," *Modern Philology* 101 (2003): 204-234, at 210-214.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 16-43 for a summary and analysis of the scene.

[Let the Fiesolan beasts make straw of each other, but let them not touch the plant, if any still sprout in their manure, in which may live again the holy seed of the Romans who remained there when that nest of so much malice was built.]

Convivio's efforts to separate nobility from family bloodlines conflict with Dante's account of the "sementa santa" ("holy seed") of Roman blood in passages such as this one.¹⁸⁰ Florence's relationship to Rome relied on a strong sense of hereditary continuity. In translating the *Aeneid* into Italian, Andrea Lancia presented his patron with the prehistory of Florence's genealogical roots.

The preface to Lancia's translation vacillates between celebrating Florence's genealogical connection with Aeneas and inviting the reader to generate other, less contingent connections with the past. Lancia opens the preface by emphasizing exemplarity rather than heredity. He proposes that the deeds of the ancient Romans should be "esempio e dottrina di noi" ("an example and instruction for us").¹⁸¹ This approach to history downplays the role of genealogical connections in favor of ethical ones. Indeed, as Andrea argues, virtue trumps blood among the greatest of the Romans. He asks, "chi mi troverai tu più chiaro esempio in amare la sua patria che fue il nobile Bruto, il quale, per liberarla di servitudine e di tirannía, si dispuose a pericolo di morte, e cacciò per forza il Tarquino re, suo prossimano parente?"¹⁸² ("Who will you find me who more clearly exemplifies love of country than noble Brutus, who, to free his country from

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Roberto Bizzocchi, "La nobiltà in Dante, la nobiltà di Dante: cultura nobiliare, memoria storica e genealogia fra Medio Evo e Rinascimento," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 4 (1991): 201-215.

¹⁸¹ Pietro Fanfani, "Compilazione della Eneide di Virgilio fatta volgare per Ser Andrea Lancia," *Etruria* 1 (1851): 162-88, 221-52, 296-318, 497-508, 625-32, 745-60, at 165.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

tyranny, placed himself in mortal danger and forcibly drove out King Tarquin, his close relative?") Brutus himself valued love of country more than blood relations. By encouraging his Florentine readers to relate to the past via imitation rather than genetic connectivity, Andrea invites them, similarly, to value exemplary virtue over blood. According to this model of historiography, the Roman past is meaningful for everyone, not just to those of Roman blood. The model of Roman virtue is accessible to all readers.

Yet although this approach to history works for reading, it does not fully justify the project of translating the *Aeneid*. If family connections don't matter, why go back to Aeneas—why not simply collect the deeds of the Romans? As if anticipating this objection, Andrea argues, “a volere conoscere queste cose, è ottimo da cominciare dalla vera origine, senza la quale il mezzo nè la fine non si puote perfettamente sapere.”¹⁸³ (“In order to understand these things [Roman exemplary deeds], it is best to begin from their true origin, without which neither the middle nor the end can be perfectly known.”) We still need history writing because it allows us to recognize and understand virtue. This argument preserves the linear form of the development from Troy to Rome and implicitly invites direct connections between Rome and Florence. Lancia thus celebrates ethical nobility and synchronic readings of the past even as he takes his starting point from Florence's genealogical background and employs an openly diachronic form.

Lancia continues to be open to multiple modes of representing Florence's past as he introduces the literary historical context and the content of the *Aeneid*. There is no question that Florence derives from good stock. Aeneas, Lancia observes, is “bellissimo

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

di corpo, chiaro per arme e di sangue splendente.”¹⁸⁴ (“Exceedingly handsome, famous in battle, and of glorious bloodlines.”) But the *Aeneid*’s author has a more tenuous connection with Roman bloodlines. Virgil is described as “uomo scienziatissimo, poeta ottimo, di nazione mantovano, di sangue, non così come di vertude, nobile.”¹⁸⁵ (“An exceptionally learned man, a very great poet, Mantuan by origin, noble less because of blood than through virtue.”) Virgil is a model of ethical nobility, his status deriving from virtue, not blood. However, as Lancia further explains, the *Aeneid* itself emerges from and reflects a familial relationship. Virgil wrote his poem “a onore e a laude di’Ottaviano Auguste secondo imperadore di Roma e suo figliuolo adottivo e erede [. . .] scrisse questo libro delli magnifici fatti e felici opera d’Enea, dal quale il detto Attaviano discese.”¹⁸⁶ (in honor and praise of Octavian Augustus, second emperor of Rome, along with his adoptive son and heir [. . .] he wrote this book about the magnificent deeds and gracious works of Aeneas, from whom the aforementioned Octavian descended.”) The *Aeneid*’s project is to celebrate Octavian’s bloodlines—and to substantiate them, including Octavian’s adopted son and heir in Aeneas’s lineage. Virgil’s status as a Mantuan and a man noble through his ethics makes him the perfect author for this history. He confirms the strength of the emperor’s bloodlines (and, implicitly, of Florence’s origins) from the perspective of a virtuous outsider. The prologue thus reaches a tentative compromise between ethical and genealogical readings of the *Aeneid*: ethical nobility emerges as a

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Fanfani, “Compilazione,” 166.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

powerful interpretive perspective, one even able to articulate the truth of blood relationships.

Lancia facilitates the exemplary interpretation of the past via translation tactics aimed towards clear exposition of the plot. According to its prologue, Lancia bases his translation on a prose redaction of the *Aeneid* by one Friar Nastagio.¹⁸⁷ As Giulia Valerio observes, the resulting *volgarizzamento* involves a great deal of summary and abridgment.¹⁸⁸ Lancia renders direct speech as indirect and eliminates material where possible. Thus for example, Virgil's account of the destruction of Troy is drastically simplified in the Italian. The Latin reads,

Urbs antiqua ruit multos dominata per annos;
corpora perque domos et religiosa deorum
limina. Nec soli poenas dant sanguine Teucri;
quondam etiam uictis redit in praecordia uirtus
uictoresque cadunt Danai. Crudelis ubique
luctus, ubique pauor et plurima mortis imago.
(*Aen.* II.363-9)

The ancient city falls after dominion
Many long years. In windows on the streets,
In homes, on solemn porches of the gods,
Dead bodies lie. And not alone the Trojans
Pay the price with their heart's blood; at times
Manhood returns to fire even the conquered
And Danaan conquerors fall. Grief everywhere,
Everywhere terror, and all shapes of death.¹⁸⁹

Lancia's translation employs extreme compression:

L'antica città rovina, che signoreggiò per molti anni: molti corpi sono abbattuti per le vie: in ogni luogo è pianto, in ogni luogo paura e molta immagine di morte,

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Valerio, "La cronologia," 8-13.

¹⁸⁹ Translations from Robert Fitzgerald, trans., *The Aeneid* (New York, 1992).

sicome il fuoco che arde le selve e le biade, e sicome lo fiume che stravolge grandissime pietre.

The ancient city is destroyed, which ruled for many years: numerous bodies are cast in the streets: in every place there is lament, in every place fear and many images of death, as the fire that burns the groves and the farms, and as the river that overturns the largest rocks.

Andrea, or perhaps Nastagio, cuts the back and forth account of the fighting in the midst of this passage and reduces the physical details of the description of the city. The porches of the gods are rejected in favor of a less specific account of a city full of the dead. Such translation practice reflects the tendency of early *volgarizzatori* to bring the ancient text closer to the modern reader, rather than vice versa. The Trojan story presents familiar, potentially imitable models. Yet Andrea also adds a detail: the simile comparing the devastation to a fire or flood does not appear in this section of the *Aeneid*, although it is likely based on similar similes elsewhere in Book Two (such as II.496-497). The passage's overall emphasis is on simplifying the reading process, yet it retains an interest in decorative language.

As Dante himself suggests, if people without ancient family lines can grasp nobility, perhaps the new vernacular can also elevate its status. Although Lancia is often focused on clarity, he also uses Dante's poetry to create moments of formal beauty. When Lancia needs to create space within his narrative, slowing it down and emphasizing tone, he draws upon Dante. For example, in the *volgarizzamento*, when Aeneas suddenly appears before Dido, she exclaims, "O figliuolo di dea, quale fortuna ti perseguita per cotanti pericoli? Or se' tu quello Enea, il quale la santa Venus con Anchise ingenerò in sul fiume di Simois?" ("O goddess's son, what fortune has followed you through so many

dangers? Now are you that Aeneas, whom blessed Venus and Anchises engendered in the river Simois?”).¹⁹⁰ These lines adapt a Latin passage that expresses Dido’s surprise and confusion in a series of interrogative pronouns that circle around Aeneas’s circumstances before finally naming him:

Quis te, nate dea, per tanta pericula casus
insequitur? Quae vis immanibus applicat oris?
Tunc ille Aeneas, quem Dardanio Anchise
alma Venus Phrygii genuit Simoentis ad undam?
(II.615-18)

Dido questions Aeneas about his journey, periphrastically addressing him as “nate dea” before finally directly asking his name. Lancia’s translation omits much of this indirection in its rearrangement of the Latin syntax. His Dido directly addresses Aeneas (“O figliuolo di dea”) before asking her questions. Nevertheless, by drawing on Dante at the moment that Dido names Aeneas, Lancia preserves some of the polysyllabic approach to the famous name. When Dante meets Virgil in *Inferno* One, he says, ““Or se’ tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte / che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?” (*Inf.* 1.79-80). (“Now are you that Virgil, that fountain which spreads forth so broad a river of speech?”) Andrea Lancia’s “or se’ tu quello Enea, il quale [. . .]” preserves the demonstrative adjective and the relative pronoun that create distance around Aeneas’s name, reflecting his celebrity. Although the Italian cannot preserve the Latin enclitic “ne,” Andrea follows Dante in adding “or,” an additional pause before the famous name falls.

At certain points, Dante even provides the opportunity for Lancia to improve upon Virgil. The Book II passage in which Aeneas encounters Creusa’s image among the

¹⁹⁰ Fanfani, “Compilazione,” 172-73.

ruins of Troy represents an important antecedent for Dante's encounter with Casella in *Purgatorio* II. Andrea's translation, however, follows not Virgil's version of the scene but Dante's. He writes, "tre volte mi sforzai d' avinghiarle le mani al collo, e altrettante mi tornai con esse indarno al petto."¹⁹¹ ("Three times I tried to clasp my hands behind her neck, and as many times I drew them back to my breast.") In comparison, the related lines in *Purgatorio* read, "tre volte dietro a lei le mani avvinsi, / e tante mi tornai con esse al petto" (*Purg.* II.80-81) ("three times I clasped my hands behind that shade, and as many times I drew them back to my breast"). Virgil has "ter conatus ibi collo dare braccia circum; / ter frustra compressa manus effugit imago" (II.792-93).¹⁹² Andrea replaces Virgil's echoing anaphora with Dante's "tre volte [. . .] tante" parallelism. The failure of anaphora amplifies the lack of satisfaction described in this scene. Just as the embrace is unfulfilled, similarly, the line openings fail to match one another. Dante also amplifies the absence of the second, ghostly figure by focusing on his own frustrated hands rather than on the elusive ghost. By taking these effects from Dante, Andrea not only creates a heightened sense of absence, but also chooses language well-suited to his own prose. Whereas Virgil's lines are heightened by anaphora on "ter," Dante's imagery of the empty embrace works both in and out of verse.

In contrast to the attentive translations above, other sections of Andrea's poetry evoke half-remembered echoes of Dante's verse. Valerio observes that both Andrea and Ciampolo draw on *Purgatorio* in order to translate Dido's famous line, "agnosco ueteris uestigia flammae" (IV.23). Dante utters his own version of this line upon seeing Beatrice

¹⁹¹ Fanfani, "Compilazione," 185.

¹⁹² Cf. Valerio, "La cronologia," 16.

in the Earthly Paradise: “conosco i segni de l’antica fiamma” (30.48) (“I recognize the signs of the ancient flame”). Ciampolo’s translation of the Virgilian line directly imports Dante: he writes, “cognosco i segni dell’antica fiamma.” Andrea Lancia, meanwhile, translates the line “conosco l’orme della vecchia fiamma,” (“I recognize the traces of the ancient flame”) a line that, Valerio suggests, loses all of its vigor along with the Dantean diction.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, despite its distance from Dante’s words, the line retains the *Commedia*’s meter. As Valerio observes, despite its deficiency as a citation of Dante, the line remains in hendecasyllabic meter.¹⁹⁴ This hint of poetry reflects less a direct reference to Dante than the heterogeneity of a vernacular language in the process of transformation. Dante’s poetry, possibly here mediated by Ciampolo’s translation, consciously and unconsciously shapes the forms that Andrea Lancia’s vernacular assumes.

The inclusion of Dantean language stakes a claim for the expressive power of the new vernacular. But it also moves away from the clear exposition that characterizes much of the rest of Lancia’s translation. Whereas Lancia’s domesticizing approach to Virgil makes much of the text appear accessible, the excerpts from Dante stand out because they are new and not necessarily always familiar. As Valerio and Zaggia emphasize, Lancia and Ciampolo’s translations were produced very soon after *Purgatorio* began to circulate—so soon that the *volgarizzamenti* have helped revise our understanding of the timing of Dante’s influence. Glosses on Lancia’s translation reinforce the impression that Dante’s mediating presence helps make the *volgarizzamento*’s form into an object of

¹⁹³ Fanfani, “Compilazione,” 232.

¹⁹⁴ Valerio, “La cronologia,” 16-17.

analysis. The translation's earliest manuscript, ms. Laurenziana Martelli 2 (known as the Martelli codex), includes a series of glosses, some of which also appear with the translation in ms. Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Barberinano Lat. 4086, a collection that includes an early *Convivio*.¹⁹⁵ Two of these glosses reference Dante. The first is appended to Lancia's translation of the Latin sentence, "Ceberus haec ingens latratu regna trifauci / personat aduerso recubans immanis in antro." (*Aen.* VI.417-418). ("Great Cerberus barking with his triple throat / Makes all that shoreline ring, as he lies huge / In a facing cave.") Lancia's translation has, "Cerbero il grande serpente, il quale apre tre bocche ergendosi e latrando nella spelunca."¹⁹⁶ ("Cerberus the great serpent, who opened his three mouths, raising himself up and barking in the cave.") Lancia not only simplifies the translation, but also transforms Cerberus from dog into serpent. The gloss on this line, however, focuses not on recovering Virgil's words, but on Dante. The interlinear gloss reads, "Cerbero, il gran vermo," ("Cerberus, the great worm,") a phrase taken from *Inferno* 6.22.¹⁹⁷ This gloss could acknowledge the closeness between Lancia and Dante or it could actually be a correction, bringing Lancia's language closer to Dante's. In either case, it emphasizes an interest in form, focused not on Virgil but on Dante's vernacular poetics.

The glosses' interest in Dante's language adds layers to the *Aeneid* translation, transforming it from political into literary history. As Virgil describes the weight of Aeneas's living body upon Charon's raft, the glossator adds a line from *Inferno* II: "tu

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Luca Azzetta, "Un'antologia esemplare."

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

dici che di Silvio il parente, Corrutibile ancora, a l'immortale Secolo andò e fu sensibilmente.” (“You say that the father of Silvius, still in corruptible flesh, went to the immortal realm and was there with his senses.”)¹⁹⁸ Even as Virgil’s poem appears to be almost eclipsed by the opportunity to explore Dante’s new vernacular, a hint of the diachronic relationship between the *Commedia* and the *Aeneid* re-emerges. The quotation serves as a reminder that neither the *Inferno* nor the *Aeneid* can be interpreted without attending to language: Dante himself is careful to represent the *Aeneid* as merely Virgil’s word: “tu dici.” On the one hand, Andrea strips down the *Aeneid* and renders it easily comprehensible. Yet at the same time, he uses Dante’s language to build up the *volgarizzamento*’s language, and in so doing, reintroduces questions of intertextuality and ambiguity.

Boccaccio’s *Decameron* amplifies the conflicts inherent in Lancia’s project by depicting a past at once less accessible to the present and more desired by it than in the *volgarizzamento*. Boccaccio treats ethical nobility and historicity in the ninth story of the fifth day of the *Decameron*, a story that he attributes to Andrea Lancia’s own patron, Coppo de Borghese degli Domenichi. From its outset, the novella balances an ethical reading practice with nostalgia for the Florentine past. Fiammetta, queen of the fifth day, tells the ninth story, but attributes it to Coppo, whom she characterizes as an urban, oral historian. She says that he delighted in telling stories of “cose passate,” “things past,” and

¹⁹⁸ Fanfani, “Compilazione,” 301.

that his memory and eloquence made him especially good at it (5.9.4).¹⁹⁹ She describes Coppo himself as “per costumi e per virtù, molto più che per nobiltà di sangue, chiarissimo e degno d’eterna fama” (5.9.4). [“A person worthy of eternal fame, who achieved his position of pre-eminence by dint of his character and abilities rather than by his noble lineage.”], Coppo embodies the notion that ethical virtue does not rely on family history. As a historian whose identity is not determined by his own family blood, Coppo represents an important figure for testing the role of “cose passate” in establishing ethical, rather than genetic, models of nobility. Yet Coppo himself enters into the story as part of a lost Florentine world: he, along with several other close friends of Boccaccio—as well as Boccaccio’s father—died in the 1348 plague.²⁰⁰ And it is not entirely clear that Coppo’s particular style of storytelling can be replaced. As Fiammetta says, he delighted not only in the ethical content of the Florentine past, but also in expressing it beautifully. Fiammetta says that he not only spoke both with “maggior memoria” (“superior memory”) than most storytellers, but also with “ornato parlare” (“greater eloquence,”) (9.5.4-5). Coppo’s story promises to join beautiful form together with ethical truth, what Dante might describe as “parlare onesto.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ All quotations of the *Decameron* are from Vittore Branca, ed., *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. IV: *Decameron* (Milan: Mondadori, 1976). This passage is my translation; elsewhere, translations are from Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam, 2nd edition (London: Penguin Books, 1995), unless otherwise noted.

²⁰⁰ Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: Profilo Biografico* (Florence, 1977), 78-79.

²⁰¹ I derive the Dantean comparison from B. J. Layman, “Eloquence of Pattern in Boccaccio’s Tale of the Falcon,” *Italica* 46 (1969): 3-16, who argues that the novella expresses Boccaccio’s “implicit belief in the total comprehensibility of ‘parola ornata’ and ‘parlare onesto.’” Cf. *Inferno* II.67 and 113.

The novella itself focuses on Federigo degli Alberighi, a Florentine noble who uses up all of his ancestral wealth unsuccessfully wooing a married woman, Monna Giovanna, who is herself both “non meno onesta che bella” (“no less chaste than she was fair”) (5.9.6). Eventually he is left with only a small farm and a falcon “de’ miglior del mondo” (“of the finest breed in the whole world”) (5.9.7). Meanwhile, Monna Giovanna’s husband dies and her son falls ill. The son claims that the only cure for his disease would be to have Federigo’s falcon, and Monna Giovanna reluctantly goes to Federigo’s farm in order to request this enormous favor. But when she arrives, Federigo realizes that he has nothing to give her to eat. In a rush, he cooks and serves the falcon. The two only recognize what has happened at the end of the meal. The son dies, but Monna Giovanna admires Federigo’s gesture so much that she eventually marries him, and they both live happily on her family fortune.

As Karla Taylor suggests, this novella depicts a transition between different kinds of nobility.²⁰² Federigo wastes away his old money, leaving only the falcon as a physical manifestation of his family nobility. The decision to roast the bird and serve it up transforms a material object into a gesture of good manners and generosity. Virtue, rather than ancestral wealth, achieves Federigo’s desire. But Federigo’s falcon is not simply supplanted by a truer nobility. Rather, it undergoes a series of reinterpretations and transformations. Boccaccio says that Federigo tests the bird and finds it “grasso,” fat (5.9.25). The coarse translation of the living bird into an object of consumption seems

²⁰² Karla Taylor, “Chaucer’s Uncommon Voice: Some Contexts for Influence,” in *The Decameron and The Canterbury Tales: New Essays on an Old Question*, eds. Leonard Michael Koff and Brenda Deen Schildgen (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 47-82, at 66-68.

like a gross misinterpretation. And once Monna Giovanna reveals her purpose, Federigo realizes that he has indeed misread the bird's significance: with comic understatement, he laments that "in altra maniera il disideravate" (5.9.36). ("You wanted it in a different form.") Yet Federigo's fleshly reinterpretation of the falcon facilitates his rejection of it in favor of ethical virtue. By the novella's conclusion the bird takes on yet another shape and significance, living on as a memory. Monna Giovanna, urged to marry, recalls Federigo's sacrifice of "un così fatto falcone," ("so fine a falcon") and insists that she will have no one else (5.9.39). Instead of being a flesh and blood embodiment of Federigo's genetic nobility, the falcon becomes a disembodied testament to his ethical nobility. It is first reinterpreted, then rejected, and then finally transformed into part of a larger text attesting to Federigo's virtue. And as Taylor observes, this kind of nobility is handed down not in blood but in storytelling.

Handing down exemplary models of nobility requires that a story take on interpretive clarity, a quality that Boccaccio pushes to its extreme. Pairing away the complexities of Federigo's story, he depicts a fantasy of virtue rewarded. Federigo's gain comes with the convenient departure of Madonna Giovanna's son, who quickly dies without the falcon: "o per malincolia che il falcone aver non potea o per la 'nfermità che pure a ciò il dovesse aver condotto, non trapassar molti giorni che egli con grandissimo dolor della madre di questa vita passò" (5.9.38). ("And to his mother's indescribable sorrow, within the space of a few days, whether through his disappointment in not being able to have the falcon, or because he was in any case suffering from a mortal illness, the child passed from this life.") This highly qualified sentence almost—but not quite—

absolves Federigo of any guilt for the son's death.²⁰³ After all, he benefits from the son's death, for it not only frees up Madonna Giovanna's money but also removes the traces of a rival male lineage. The vestiges of Madonna Giovanna's first marriage, like the vestiges of Federigo's ancient wealth, vanish. And Federigo's good luck continues. Madonna Giovanna explains to her brothers that wealth is valueless if not attached to a good man: "io voglio avanti uomo che abbia bisogno di ricchezza che ricchezza che abbia bisogno d'uomo" (5.9.42). ("I would sooner have a gentleman without riches, than riches without a gentleman.") Despite these bold words, the novella does not leave its hero in poverty. Upon hearing of Federigo's good manners, Madonna Giovanna's brothers give their sister, along with her money, to Federigo, with the result that the happy couple lives "ricchissimo" ("very rich") to the end of their days (5.9.43). This new money is the opposite of the ancient wealth that Dante rejects as a putative cause of nobility. Federigo's return to wealth and happiness appears to derive entirely from his own actions in the present moment. His past, meanwhile, is left behind: Franco Cardini reads the sacrifice of the falcon as a "violenza fondatrice," a founding violence that builds Federigo's and Madonna Giovanna's marriage on the death of Federigo's friends (the falcon and the boy).²⁰⁴ Like Aeneas himself, whose first wife Creusa must die for Rome, Federigo leaves behind old attachments in order to found a new tradition; in this case, not a genealogical one, but a moral one.

²⁰³ As Taylor observes, it also presents the son as an ignoble contrast to Federigo, one who is punished accordingly (Taylor, "Chaucer's Uncommon Voice," 67.)

²⁰⁴ Cf. Franco Cardini, "Il banchetto del falcone, ovvero l'amante mangiato," *Quaderni medievali* 17 (1984): 45-71, at 70.

Fiammetta argues, perhaps with tongue in cheek, that reading Federigo's story should help her audience read and recognize virtue in the world around them. As she tells the listening women, the story is intended to help them choose lovers: "perché apprendiate d'esser voi medesime, dove si conviene, donatrici de'vostri guiderdoni, senza lasciarne sempre esser la fortuna guidatrice" (5.9.3). ("So that you may learn to chose for yourselves, whenever necessary, the persons on whom to bestow your largesse, instead of always leaving these matters to be decided for you by Fortune.") And yet contingency, in the shape of attachments formed through nostalgia, affects the kinds of desire at work within the *Tale*. As noted earlier, carrying over the content of Coppo's story is not enough; the novella imagines carrying over his voice as well. Words and images in the story outstay their necessary roles. As Federigo's falcon obediently awaits its master's wishes it is described as "il suo buon falcone" ("his good falcon") (5.9.7, 5.9.25). The falcon, now roasted, retains the same epithet even as Madonna Giovanna and Federigo eat: "mangiarono il buon falcone" ("they ate the good falcon") (5.9.27).²⁰⁵ The term "buon" retains a memory of what the bird once was, made all the more poignant by the possibility of reinterpreting the term to be a reference to the falcon's flavor. Just as the word resists complete absorption into a new meaning (good food), the falcon resists reduction to an instrument of Federigo's virtue. Despite the ease with which the novella's plot sheds its lovers' past, its very language is imprinted with a sense of loss.

The desire to recover a lost past underlies the entire novella, offering an affective critique of its efforts to connect with Florentine history on a purely exemplary level.

²⁰⁵ My translations.

Dante, though he inveighs against “poco nostra nobiltà di sangue,” (“our paltry nobility of blood”) also admits that we glory in it, and that he gloried in it all the more upon discovering his ancestor Cacciaguida in heaven (*Par.* 16.1). Dante’s delight at discovering his own blood in heaven is matched by Cacciaguida’s sorrow at the decline of the noble families of Florence. Among them are Federigo’s own kin. Cacciaguida says,

Io vidi li Ughi e vidi I Catellini,
Filippi, Greci, Ormanni e Alberichi,
Già nel calare, illustri cittadini.
(*Par.* 16.88-90)

I saw the Ughi and I saw the Catellini, Filippi,
Greci, Ormanni, and Alberichi, illustrious citizens,
Already in decline.

Dante delights in finding a piece of his own familial past, but many ancient bloodlines are already on the brink of extinction in Cacciaguida’s time. Ethical connections are a poor substitute once genealogical continuity has been lost. As a member of the Alberighi, Federigo represents a family associated with the loss of the past, its absence from the present. This very absence makes the promise of ethical and exemplary approaches to history all the more hollow. Such interpretive moves cannot fulfill the desire for a past that is, on the one hand, only recently lost and, on the other, already irretrievably gone.

The Wife of Bath’s Tale shares with both Andrea’s translation and Boccaccio’s novella an interest in the stakes of interpretive clarity. Much of the *Tale* is occupied by a search for the straightforward, whether in the form of an easy rubric for reading women or in the opening account of an overcrowded and overcomplicated modernity. The Wife famously describes the modern landscape in a chaotic list of “halles, chambres, kichenes, boures, /

Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures, / Thropes, bernis, shipnes, dayeryes" (III.870-72).

"Burghes" are set alongside "castels;" the list lacks overarching reason or coherence, offering a syntactic equivalent to the "worn world" of modernity that Louise O.

Fradenburg recognizes in the *Tale*.²⁰⁶ It belies efforts to subject it to overarching organization or to limit its extension. Meanwhile, Friars cloud these spaces "as thikke as motes in the sonne-beem" (III.878). This overcrowded situation makes both language and lineage difficult to interpret, for women are constantly threatened by the possibility of rape:

Wommen may go saufly up and down.
In every bussh or under every tree
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.
(III.788-81)

The threat of rape raises the possibility of lineage disrupted, whether by removing women from society, as Ruth Evans points out, or by discrediting paternity.²⁰⁷ Along with genealogy, here language itself becomes opaque. The passages says everything besides what it means: not only is its tone ironic and its content couched in euphemism, but even its grammar and poetics are ambiguous. "[D]ishonour" has not only multiple meanings, but also multiple scansions: it could be read either as iambs or as an un-metrical dactyl.

²⁰⁶ Louise O. Fradenburg, "The Wife of Bath's Passing Fancy," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 8 (1986): 31-58, at 43. On the historical fantasy at work in the *Tale*, see also Patricia Clare Ingham, "Pastoral Histories: Utopia, Conquest, and the Wife of Bath," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 44 (2002): 34-46.

²⁰⁷ Ruth Evans, "The Devil in Disguise: Perverse Female Origins of the Nation," in Liz Herbert McAvoy and Teresa Walters, eds, *Consuming Narratives: Gender and Monstrous Appetite in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Cardiff, 2002), 182-195, at 189.

The act of rape is hidden within the tortured syntax of “he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.”

The Arthurian scene that follows sets the stage for a comparatively comprehensible, meaningful encounter with the past. Within a couplet, the *Tale* shifts scenes: “dishonour” rhymes with “kyng Arthour,” and the crowded landscape is replaced with a knight “allone as he was born” (III.885). Almost as quickly as the scene is set, however, it descends into violence, as the knight quickly encounters and rapes the woman walking “beforn” him (III.886). This founding violence sets into motion a new search for interpretive certainty. As Kathleen Biddick observes, the Queen’s command that the knight make meaning of his crime transforms “the silence of rape [. . .] into a pedagogical resource for ethnography.”²⁰⁸ The knight turns his efforts to interpreting female desire, but again, almost immediately, complexity begins to proliferate. The knight is faced with a dizzying catalogue of different desires:

Somme seyde women loven best richesse,
Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse,
Somme riche array, somme seyden lust abedde,
And oftetye to be wydwe and wedde.
(III.925-28)

A counterpart to the catalogue of buildings in the opening of the *Tale*, this list of desires extends without apparent organization or boundaries. Chaucer uses anaphora to assemble the many answers presented to the knight, but the effect is less that of clarity than of comedy. The term “somme seid” proliferates: it begins lines and picks up again after the

²⁰⁸ Kathleen Biddick, “The Cut of Genealogy: Pedagogy in the Blood,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (2000): 449-62, at 457. Cf. also Jill Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1991), 87-93, and Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI, 1989), 126-31.

caesura, introducing nothing more than yet another term: “richesse,” “jolynesse” or “honour.” Opinions grow as thickly as do the buildings and the friars of the modern world, clogging Chuacer’s poetry as they do.

The loathly lady, with her incisive reading practice, offers a solution to this poetics of proliferation. Her lecture on *gentillesse* cuts away hermeneutical obscurity by reducing the object of interpretation to its simplest possible state. As she explains,

Looke who that is moost vertuous alwey,
Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedes that he kan;
Taak hym for the grettest gentil man.
Crist wol we clayme of hym oure gentillesse,
Nat of oure eldres for hire old richesse.
(III.1113-18)

The semantically repetitive rhyme on “alwey” and “ay” enforces the consistency of the reading practice the hag describes. The repetition continues in the next two lines: the greatest “gentil man” is the man who does “gentil dedes.” This is language that does not admit substitution; it resists the proliferation of lexicon and insists, through repetition that the hag is saying precisely what she means. Thematically, these same repetitions depict ethical nobility as a constant state: the truly noble person is “alwey” virtuous and “ay” intends to do gentle deeds. Ethical *gentillesse* not only promises to adjudicate between different people, but also to make meaning of the complex, changeable material of a single lifetime.

This claim for transparency is achieved by eliminating contingency. Elders, the hag argues, leave nothing to us that matters: the fame of our ancestors is “a strange thyng to thy persone (III.1161). Our ancestry is merely accident, it has nothing to do with out

intrinsic nobility. This is a more extreme rhetorical position than that of Boethius, who admits that one's ancestry, while not determinative of nobility, carries a certain persuasive power: "it semeth as that a maner necessite be imposed to gentil men for that thei ne schulde nat owtrayen or forlynen fro the vertus of hir noble kynrede" (*Boece* 3p6.48-51). Even though bloodlines do not, in and of themselves, make a person gentle, they exert pressure on the descendants of virtuous men. Even Dante observes that those with gentle forefathers are like people following a trail in the snow: virtue is easier for them (but less admirable for that reason) (*Conv.* IV.vii.6-9).

Chaucer's hag, however, is emphatic that true nobility has nothing to do with one's past. Indeed, her configuration of ancestry as a "strange thyng" comes from Boethius, but not from his discussion of nobility.²⁰⁹ Lady Philosophy focuses on things that are "strange" in her refutation of the true value of wealth, of beautiful gemstones, and ultimately of natural beauty, where she insists on a sharp division between those things that pertain to us and those that do not: "'Aperteneth,' quod sche, 'any of thilke thynges to the? [. . .] Why embracest thou straunge goodes as they were thyne?'" (*Boece* 2p5.63-64, 69-71). Even here, as John Marenbon notes, her position is moderate: "she does not rule out that, in moderation, the ornamental goods of fortune can be useful as means to purchasing true goods."²¹⁰ Chaucer's hag, by comparison, uses the notion of "straunge goods" to achieve simplicity and clear interpretive perspective. By pruning away our ancestry as simply another ornamental gift of fortune, the hag imagines people as easily legible.

²⁰⁹ III.1161 note.

²¹⁰ Marenbon, *Boethius*, 106.

The hag further removes excess from her own pedagogical discourse by emphasizing continuity amongst the *auctores* who support her argument. She rarely cites their words directly; although she provides the exemplum of Tullius Hostilius from Valerius Maximus, she only gives summary citations of Boethius and Seneca in her account of *gentillesse*: “reedeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece; / Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is / That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis” (III.1170). The hag emphasizes the “expressed” juice of content rather than exterior form: Valerius, Boethius, Seneca, and the hag herself all agree on the meaning that the hag herself gives in paraphrase. With her attention given to interior meaning rather than exterior trapping, the hag references specific authorities with growing indifference. She cites “Senec and othere clerkes” on the value of poverty (III.1184). And by the time the hag reaches her discussion of old age, she could care less whom she cites, observing only “auctores shal I fynden, as I gesse” (III.1212). If meaning is all that matters, then authorial names need not proliferate within Chaucer’s poets: it makes little difference from where the hag invents her discourse.

In practice, however, the origins of the hag’s speech do matter. As Alastair Minnis suggests, Chaucer may have been wary of close identification with Lollard positions on true nobility. His decision to cite Dante may partially be a function of the Italian poet’s “remoteness and distance.”²¹¹ Indeed, as Minnis puts it, “place *does* and *did* matter—despite the Boethian/Dantean argument to the contrary.”²¹² And once the hag makes this compromise to her historical context, the ramifications are significant. With

²¹¹ Minnis, “Dante in Inglissh,” 112.

²¹² *Ibid.*

uncustomary care, the hag introduces the passage by locating Dante in Florence, explaining,

We kan the wise poete of Florence,
That highte Dant, speken in this sentence.
Lo, in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:
“Ful selde up riseth by his branches smale
Prowesse of man, for God, of his goodnesse,
Wol that of hym we clayme oure gentillesse.”
(III.1125-30)

The introduction oscillates between emphasizing content (“sentence”) and form. Dante is cited because he speaks “well,” and the hag cites him as poetry: “in swich maner rym is Dantes tale.” And in fact, Chaucer translates attentively, preserving much of Dante’s versification. The corresponding lines in *Purgatorio* read,

Rade volte resurge per li rami
L’umana probitate, e questo vole
Quei che la dà, perché da lui si chiami.
(*Purg.* 7.121-24)

The first two lines of Chaucer’s translation preserve the enjambment of Dante’s verses. Both poems drop from the “branches smale”/“rami” to “prowess of man,” as if moving in opposition to the failed rising movement they describe. But Chaucer’s translation changes the second part of the *terzina*. The English translation resists the allusive pronouns that structure Dante’s reference to “quei che la dà,” instead making the subject of the sentence immediately clear: God wants us to claim our *gentillesse* from him. Similarly, instead of postponing the purpose clause explaining God’s intent until almost the ending of the sentence, Chaucer begins with it. *Gentillesse* is rarely inherited “for” the reason that God wants us to recognize him as its origin. Chaucer’s changes to the second part of his borrowing advance the project of the hag’s rhetoric. He emphasizes clarity, using proper

nouns rather than leaving the reader to guess the referent of pronouns. These changes strive for a clear account of the true origin and significance of *gentillesse*.

And yet the very process of translating Dante generates difficulties that obscure the meaning of the English poem. Dante's universal adjective "umana" has no equivalent in Chaucer's English; the term "humaine," which could carry a similar meaning, does not appear in Middle English until the mid-fifteenth century.²¹³ Instead, Chaucer uses the phrase "of man." This has the effect of making the lines more ambiguous—Chaucer could be describing human prowess, or he could be describing the prowess of an individual man—confusion amplified by the term "his" in the line above. Although the difference in the message is small, the difference in tone is significant: Chaucer leaves it unclear whether his hag is speaking in the largest, most universal terms or whether she is inferring a conclusion from an individual example. More significantly, in the midst of the hag's efforts to define "gentillesse," Dante's language introduces a different and unexpected term. The choice of the word *prowessee* to translate *probitate* appears to be based as much on the sound of the words as on their significance. The English *prowessee* was used to describe military valor more frequently than ethical nobility in the late fourteenth century.²¹⁴ The translation generates an unexpectedly gendered approach to nobility, one that seems misplaced in the hag's mouth.

²¹³ "Humaine, adj.," *Middle English Dictionary Online*, Regents of the University of Michigan, 2001, visited 19 March 2013.

²¹⁴ "Proues, n.," *Middle English Dictionary Online*, Regents of the University of Michigan, 2001, visited 19 March 2013. The *Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana* gives "onestà" as the first meaning of *probità*, but cites *Purgatorio* as its first example. Other medieval authors who used the term in this way include Saint Bernardino of Siena.

Chaucer's citation of Dante would, of course, not have been accessible to most of his contemporary readers. As much as Dante's poetry shapes Chaucer's, its influence is partially obscured and not entirely comprehensible. However, a second moment of extended translation may have been more recognizable. As the hag shifts from her lecture on nobility to a defense of poverty, she includes a paradoxical definition of poverty based on a passage from Vincent of Beauvais. She explains,

Poverté is hateful good and, as I gesse,
A ful greet bryngere out of bisynesse;
A greet amendere eek of sapience
To hym that taketh it in pacience.
Poverté is this, although it seme alenge:
Possessioun that no wight wol challenge.
(III.1195-1200)

A Latin gloss on the Ellesmere manuscript supplies the source for these lines: "Secundus Philosophus Paupertas est odibile bonum, sanitatis mater curarum remocio, sapientie reparatrix, possessio sine calumpnia."²¹⁵ ("According to the Philosopher, Poverty is a hateful good, mother of health, removal from cares, restorer of wisdom, and possession without tricks.") This definition of poverty might be familiar to a reader of the *Piers Plowman* B-Text: Langland's Patience cites them in Latin in Passus 14. When Haukyn complains that he does not understand the Latin, Patience admits that translating will be a challenge: "'In Englissh,' quod Pacience, 'it is wel hard, wel to expounen, / Ac somdeel I

("Probità, n. 1," Salvatore Battaglia, ed., *Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana* (Turin, 1961).

²¹⁵ John Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of The Canterbury Tales*, 503.

shal seyen it, by so thow understonde” (*PPl.B.* XIV.278-79).²¹⁶ The account that follows focuses not so much on translation than exposition and paraphrase. Patience gives reasons for each of the Latin phrases, explaining, for example, that poverty is “joye also to the soule, pure spiritual helthe, / And contricion confort, and *cura animarum*: *Ergo paupertas est odibile bonum*” (*PPl.B.* XIV.285-86). Chaucer’s suggestion that one needs “pacience” to gain wisdom from poverty might suggest a cloaked reference to Langland. If so, it puts Chaucer’s text into a competitive relationship with its vernacular predecessor, for the Wife’s *Tale* closely translates precisely that passage that Langland describes as difficult to expound.

The actual translation, however, differs from Langland both in its purpose and in its effects. In sharp contrast to *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer does not paraphrase. He not only translates closely, but works to preserve the aphoristic quality of the Latin prose by keeping each definition of poverty (“odibile bonum,” “possessio sine calumpnia”) contained within a single line. The side effect of this translation technique is a proliferation of filler: material used to complete lines and preserve the poem’s rhyme scheme. Chaucer uses “as I gesse” to complete the rhyme with “bisynesse” and “although it seme alenge” to rhyme “challenge.” Just as in *Troilus and Criseyde*’s torturous rendering of Boethian prose, discussed in Chapter Two, here Chaucer’s use of filler emphasizes the agonistic process of translation; the difficulty of assimilating one text not only to another language, but also to a different literary form. Chaucer transforms the

²¹⁶ All quotations of *Piers Plowman* refer to A. V. C. Schmidt, ed., *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17* (London, 1995).

work of definition into formal work. He invents not only content but also form from the definition as he uses its series of epithets to construct individual verses of poetry.

Once again, form interposes itself between the significance of the words and their reader. The hag's argument must be filtered through language that fills itself with formal performance and with cross reference, "as thikke as motes in the sonne-beem" (III.868). Form thus resists the interpretive simplifications of ethical *gentillesse*, and it also resists the *Tale's* fanciful historicity, building itself up even as the *Tale* imagines removing modern artifices. In other words, form has multiple functions within *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. On the one hand, the Wife's historicism has a form: it attempts to create an interpretable past through its pedagogical plot, its use of simplified language, and its hermeneutics of ethical *gentillesse*. But on the other hand, Chaucer's formal experiments, his engagement with the verification and prosody of other texts, disrupt such efforts.

In this way, the *Tale* explores the artifice of its own historical perspective. The knight is required to let go of his attachment to his own "nacion" and his fantasies of masculine control in order to marry the virtuous hag (III.1068). These losses, however, merely occlude the initial rape, the *Tale's* own sacrifice, used to found its pedagogical structure. The *Tale's* own historicism, its efforts to create an interpretable account of the past, is based on a violent pairing away of material, as it relegates part of the past (the raped woman) to unintelligibility.²¹⁷ That such perspectives rely on form—and can be betrayed by form—becomes evident in the *Tale's* final transition:

²¹⁷ Cf. Corinne J. Saunders, "Women Displaced: Rape and Romance in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*," *Arthurian Literature* 13 (1995): 115-131. See also Patterson, *Chaucer and*

And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende
In parfit joye; and Jhesu Crist us sende
Housboundes meeke, younge, and fressh abedde,
And grace t'overbtde hem that we wedde.
(III.1256-60)

The story of the knight and the hag ends too soon; the word “ende” lacks a rhyme, and their “joye” ends at the caesura. In the leftover formal space, the hag builds her moral onto the story, rhyming “sende” with “ende” as she makes her own cynical prayer for rich and meek husbands. Form thus generates the open space in which the Wife appends her own coda to the *Tale*’s conclusion, undoing its “wish-fulfilling promises” as she does so.²¹⁸ Rhyme and meter not only resist unequivocal representations of the past, they may also surprise predictions of what is to come.

the Subject, 314-315, who suggests that the cynical conclusion marks the limits of the *Tale*’s own “masculine enterprise.”

²¹⁸ Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, WI, 1991), 315.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Werk unresonable:” Perspectives on Time in *The Franklin’s Tale* and Its Sources

Chaucer’s Franklin begins his *Tale* by disavowing the influence of any poetic instruction:

I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso
Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Scithero.
Colored ne knowe I none, withouten drede,
But swiche colours as growen in the mede,
Or ells swiche as men dye or peynte.
(V.721-25)

The Franklin is, according to him, a natural speaker. He knows “colours as growen in the mede,” not the rhetorical “colours” established by human convention. Of course, this modesty claim is undermined in the very moment that it is uttered. The Franklin’s assertion that he has never slept on the “Mount of Pernaso” derives from Persius’s *Satires*. This is not organic speech. Moreover, the Franklin’s own account of colors promptly turns to forms of human artifice: dying and painting. In Boethius’s account of the Golden Age, the inhabitants of the prehistorical world know nothing about dying clothes (“they coude nat medle the bryghte fleeces of the contre of Seryens with the venym of Tyrie” (*Boece* IIm5.9-10)). The ability to dye material comes together with trade, warfare, money, and an entry into political history. For all of his claims to be untutored, the Franklin’s story emerges within literary historical context (he describes it as Breton lay) and reflects a particular rhetorical occasion (the abrupt interruption of *The Squire’s Tale*). Is there any way to reconcile these layers of historicity with a notion of the *Tale* as a natural creation? Or to put it differently, does the *Tale* respond only to the contingencies of social, linguistic, and literary situations, or does it somehow access more fundamental, ahistorical perspectives? In this chapter, I will propose that both of these

ways of knowing the world intersect in *The Franklin's Tale*, as Chaucer considers what poetry can achieve perspective on temporality from within the chaotic space of literary history.

The first three chapters of this dissertation have focused on how interactions between texts write themselves into the form of Chaucer's poetry. I have argued that the resultant rough surface of *Troilus* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale* provides a window into historical difference: difference between source text and receiving tradition, and difference within the receiving text itself. Perhaps a more familiar approach to the relationship between time and poetic form, and one that will implicitly be at issue in this chapter, is that explored by Saint Augustine in his discussion of the Psalms. Augustine proposes that the recitation of a Psalm (even silently) allows us to experience the passage of time as a constant flow of memory and expectation.²¹⁹ As Susan Stewart observes, poetry calls us to attention in this way because its formal organization makes it susceptible to recognition and anticipation: "sound patterns teach us to listen and not merely to hear."²²⁰ Poetry replaces chaotic, unpredictable sound with a pattern, bringing us out of eternity and allowing us to experience time as linear.

However, for Dante, Chaucer, and the other authors I have considered thus far, poetic patterning bears the traces of a complex series of transitions between different languages. The text produced in such contexts are not completely predictable: they take on flaws and disruptions in the process of translation. Although the Psalms themselves will not come under further discussion in this chapter, the intersection between

²¹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Cambridge, 1992), xi.28.

²²⁰ Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago, 2002), 205.

Augustine's highly theorized account of reading the Psalms as temporality and the actual translational history of the Psalms and other poetry highlights my central concern. If poetic form uses memory and expectation to key us into the constant forward movement of time, what happens when form also reflects the contingency of a certain rhetorical situation or an accident of interlingual transmission?

In *The Franklin's Tale*, Chaucer considers both of these perspectives on temporality and form. But crucially, he works from a position informed by his source, Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, a text that considers in detail how we can achieve any objective perspective on time and change. A conversionary narrative, the *Filocolo* introduces Christianity as a means of knowing both the present moment and its relationship to previous moments. But although *Il Filocolo* produces a remarkable account of a single key transition: that between pagan past and Christian present, it does not necessarily provide as powerful a sense of ongoing, continuous change as does one of its own key source texts, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid uses poetic form to account for a world in which transition is constant and perspectives are never stable. The *Metamorphoses* never rests within a coherent "now." In other words, both of the texts lurking behind *The Franklin's Tale* use form to intimate the structure of temporality, although they differ on the precise nature of this structure. Together, these two texts open the question of whether literary form exposes the true structure of time or whether it merely regulates time, providing us with one possible way of interpreting temporality.

The Augustinian capacity of poetic form to perform linear movement in time plays an important role in *The Franklin's Tale*. I will suggest that it helps motivate the

digressive energy of Dorigen's Complaint, in which the poem's female protagonist resists settling in a single, decisive moment. But more explicitly than Boccaccio or Ovid, Chaucer also troubles the notion that literary language exposes the truth of temporality—or even that poetry is particularly successful in regulating the passage of time. The intertextual references within *The Franklin's Tale*, as well as the glosses on its margins, show how Chaucer's form emerges in response to its rhetorical situation, its source texts, and its own impulse to invent order from pagan history. Once again, Chaucer reveals poetic form to be a layered, palimpsestic, and contingent creation. I will conclude by proposing that the interaction between form's contingency and its attempts to organize linear time is key to the *Tale*'s exploration of providence and disorder. Like the black rocks off the coast of Brittany, the partially submerged history of Chaucer's form resists incorporation into a single regulatory experience of time.

Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* uses one key transition—the conversion from paganism to Christianity—to achieve perspective on the shape and significance of history. This extensive early prose work, completed while the young Boccaccio was still residing in Naples, describes the popular story of Florio and Biancifiore, brought up together as children under King Felice of Marmorina. Felice and his kingdom are pagan; Biancifiore, although raised as a pagan, is the daughter of the Christian Roman Lelio, killed on a pilgrimage to the church of St. James of Compostela. Boccaccio's meandering narrative describes the separation of the two lovers and Florio's subsequent journey to find Biancifiore, including multiple digressive episodes along the way. The lovers reunite in

the *Filocolo*'s fourth book, which brings the quest to an apparent conclusion. However, Boccaccio adds a fifth book in which Florio, Biancifiore, and eventually King Felice's kingdom convert to Christianity. The two lovers then complete Lelio's pilgrimage, bringing the entire, sprawling text to a decisive conclusion. As David Wallace argues, this Christian goal underpins the *Filocolo*'s digressive explorations of secular love and pagan life. He compares the *Filocolo*'s structure to that of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*:

Given this constant reassurance that their pilgrims are moving, moment by moment, towards a religious goal, Chaucer and Boccaccio are able to exercise their skills as secular poets with considerable freedom. Yet they evidently did not assume that the pilgrimage context could provide unqualified freedom for their pleasure-giving activities. In the course of the pilgrimage, the two poets exploit every colour of rhetoric and trick of art at their disposal; approaching its termination, however, they lay aside all this to point us towards another journey.²²¹

In both of these texts, movement towards a pious destination enables the poetic exploration of secular life.

For Boccaccio, the Christian endpoint of *Il Filocolo* can also be identified with the present-day perspective of the text's narrative voice. This voice seems, at first, to be awkwardly anachronistic. Even in the authorial prologue describing his encounter with Fiammetta, Boccaccio is at pains not to use specifically Christian language. For example, Boccaccio describes Holy Saturday thus:

[. . .] un giorno, la cui prima ora Saturno avea signoreggiata, essendo già Febo co' cuoi cavalla al sedecimo grado del celestial Montone pervenuto, e nel quale il glorioso partimento del figliuolo di Giove dagli spogliati regni di Plutone si celebrava.

(I.1.17)²²²

²²¹ Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings*, 58.

²²² All quotations from *Il Filocolo* refer to Vittore Branca, ed., *Tutte le opera di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 1: *Caccia di Diana, Filocolo* (Milan, 1967).

[. . .] one day, the dawning of which Saturn had presided over, Phoebus having by then reached with his horses the sixteenth degree of the celestial Ram, and it being furthermore the day on which the glorious departure of the son of Jove from the harrowed realms of Pluto is celebrated.²²³

James McGregor suggests that despite their apparent anachronism, passages like this one firmly locate *Il Filocolo* in a Christian historical, cultural, and literary context. As he explains, “Boccaccio’s classicizing language is really neo-classical in origin,” for it derives from Dante.²²⁴ As McGregor argues, Boccaccio takes from Dante a “lingua franca in which pagan and Christian reference can be accommodated, and the transition from the one to the other can occur.”²²⁵ Periphrastic references to dates on the ecclesiastical calendar resist specialized, Christian vocabulary. But on the other hand, as the description of Holy Saturday indicates, these passages describe a time whose structures can ultimately be read in terms of the Christian calendar.²²⁶ Christianity reveals the significance of time itself.

The capacity of Christianity to assign structure and meaning to time becomes clear near the conclusion of *Il Filocolo*. When Florio finally chooses to convert, he discovers himself to be part of a history he had not previously understood. The Roman priest Ilario introduces Florio to Christianity with a history lesson. He describes the Augustinian six ages of man, beginning with the creation. The lengthy explanation

²²³ All translations of *Il Filocolo* from Donald Cheney, with Thomas G. Bergin, trans., *Giovanni Boccaccio: Il Filocolo* (New York, 1985).

²²⁴ James H. McGregor, *The Image of Antiquity in Boccaccio’s Filocolo, Filostrato, and Teseida* (New York, 1991), 172.

²²⁵ McGregor, *The Image of Antiquity*, 173.

²²⁶ Cf. Victoria Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular: Boccaccio’s Filocolo and the Art of Medieval Fiction* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2001), 156.

integrates and contextualizes pagan events, including the falls of Thebes and Troy.

Furthermore, Christian time provides a context for locating Florio's own moment: the sixth age, full of grace, "nella quale dimoriano" ("in which we live") (V.54.1). This is not necessarily a historiography that emphasizes cultural and political difference, but it does give structure and depth to time. In contrast, when the Pagan king Felice first appears in the story, he is introduced as a descendent of Atlas, with little impression given of the length of time passed between Atlas's time and Felice's (I.10.1). In the conversion from paganism to Christianity, history emerges as a comprehensible structure with measurable length, one that puts both past and present into place.

This same transition into Christian history plays a role in Menedon's Question, the section of *Il Filocolo* that Chaucer adapts in *The Franklin's Tale*. Because there are no passages of direct translation from Boccaccio in Chaucer's *Tale*, the nature and extent of Chaucer's knowledge of the *Filocolo* has been the object of critical debate.²²⁷ In this chapter, I argue that Chaucer engages with questions of historical perspective at stake throughout *Il Filocolo*. In this sense, my approach gravitates towards those that credit

²²⁷ On Chaucer's use of Menedon's Question, see Pio Ranjia, "Le Origini della Novella: Narrata del 'Frankleyn' nei *Canterbury Tales* del Chaucer," *Romania* 32 (1903): 204-67 and N. R. Havely, *Chaucer's Boccaccio: Sources of Troilus and the Knight's and Franklin's Tales* (Cambridge, UK: D. D. S. Brewer, 1980), 1-12 and 154-161. See also Helen Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989), 233, for the argument that the two texts differ so extensively that Chaucer may be adapting Boccaccio from memory. Finally, cf. John Finlayson, "Invention and Disjunction: Chaucer's Rewriting of Boccaccio in the *Franklin's Tale*," *English Studies* 89.4 (August 2008): 385-402, for the suggestion that Chaucer used a second Boccaccian source, *Decameron* 10.5, to simplify and streamline his adaptation of Menedon's Question. Finally, for arguments taking the entire *Filocolo* into account, see Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings*, op., cit., and Dominique Battles, "Chaucer's 'Franklin's Tale' and Boccaccio's 'Filocolo' Reconsidered," *The Chaucer Review* 34.1 (1999): 38-59.

Chaucer with knowledge of the entire text. However, as I hope to show, even on its own, Menedon's Question raises interesting questions about the perspectives from which we understand our own history.

The Question comes as part of an exchange of *Questioni d'amore* in *Filocolo* Four. At this point in the narrative, Florio and Biancifiore's redemptive reunion and conversion seems only a distant possibility. Florio is stranded in Naples by bad weather, and although he is given multiple prophesies of a happy ending to his story, he nevertheless waits anxiously for the resumption of the voyage.²²⁸ Near the conclusion of the delay, Florio and his companions walk into the Neapolitan countryside, where they encounter a group of young nobles gathered within a garden, lead by the beautiful Fiammetta. Florio and his companions join the group and enjoy themselves for part of the morning. When the afternoon heat begins to increase, the partiers seek shade, and Fiammetta proposes a question exchange to help pass the time. As she explains, "secondo il mio avviso, noi non avremo le nostre questioni poste, che il caldo sarà, senza che noi il sentiamo, passato, e il tempo utilmente con diletto sarà adoperato" ("in my opinion, we shall no sooner have asked our questions than the heat will have passed without our noticing it, and the time will have been spent usefully and delightfully") (IV.17.6). The exchange of stories promises to lift the group out of the afternoon, allowing them to forget the temperature. The warmest part of the day will pass without notice—and at the same time will be used effectively. In fact, not only do the subsequent questions serve as a distraction for the young nobles, but they also distract from Boccaccio's framing

²²⁸ As for example in the brief but explicit prophesy at IV.1.12.

narrative. As Robert R. Edwards points out, the *Questioni d'amore* circulated independently from the rest of the *Filocolo* in several manuscripts.²²⁹ The questions distract from both their performative and their narrative situation. They call attention away from the passage of time and towards the pleasure of storytelling.

Menedon's Question is the fourth in the series, and includes a microcosmic representation of this space of pleasurable separation from time's passage. As Menedon explains, his question requires "una novella" ("a story") to become clear (IV.31.1). He describes how the knight Taralfo attempts to seduce a married lady. She attempts to fool him by promising to give herself to him if he can produce a May garden in January. Much to the lady's dismay, Taralfo finds a magician capable of accomplishing this feat, and the garden is created, leading to the chain of generosity that concludes the Question. As an anachronistic space walled off from the normal passage of time, the garden embodies a temporality similar to that of the *Questioni d'amore*. It partitions off a space for delight in which time seems to be suspended, just as the *Questioni*, themselves exchanged in a garden, provide an escape from the passage of a hot afternoon.

Yet this escape from time is only illusory: in the text surrounding the garden's creation, Menedon's Question involves itself in heavy questions about how the present interprets and responds to the burden of the past. Taralfo, stumped at the lady's impossible request, heads east to Thessaly, where he eventually encounters the sorcerer Tebano on the plains of Pharsalia. Tebano's very name evokes the Theban story and the

²²⁹ Edwards contributes yet another voice to the discussion outlined above, for he argues that Chaucer's source for *The Franklin's Tale* may have been one such manuscript. See Robert R. Edwards, "Source, Context, and Cultural Translation in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Modern Philology* 94 (1996-97): 141-62.

hold that the past exerts over the present. As Lee Patterson argues, “the profound circularity of Thebanness, its inability ever to diverge from the reversionary shape ordained in and by its beginning, is reflected in the details of Oedipus’s life as the Middle Ages reconstructed them.”²³⁰ Killer of his father and husband of his mother—and the author of a curse on his own sons—Oedipus epitomizes Thebanness as an inability to avoid returning to and replicating the past. Accordingly, the Tebano of Menedon’s Question imagines the past quite literally to be haunting the present. When he encounters Taralfo on the ancient battlefield, he demands, “non sai tu la qualità del luogo come ella è? Perché inanzi d’altra parte non pigliavi la via? Tu potresti di leggieri qui da furiosi spiriti essere vituperato” (IV.31.15). (“Don’t you know what kind of place this is? Why didn’t you choose some other place to wander? Here you could easily be attacked by angry ghosts.”) Tebano, the very figure who will create a garden that escapes the seasons, thinks of the past as inescapable. For Tebano, Pharsalia is not only marked by history, but also fated to continue the cycle of death begun in the Roman civil war.

Taralfo responds to the pressure of the past by resisting the notion that God’s power is in any way limited by human actions. He explains, “in ogni parte puote Iddio igualmente: così qui come altrove gli è la mia vita e ’l mio onore in mano: faccia di me secondo che a lui piace” (4.31.15). (“God is equally powerful everywhere; here as elsewhere my life and honor as in His hands. Let him do with me as He pleases.”) As Vittore Branca’s notes point out, this language is Christian.²³¹ Taralfo places his trust in God’s plan, which he assumes will transcend the legacy of human actions. Yet by the end

²³⁰ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject*, 76.

²³¹ Branca, ed., *Tutte le opere*, vol. 1 IV.31.15n15.

of *Il Filocolo*, Boccaccio has also explored a third means of grappling with the disasters of the past, one that avoids both the circularity of Theban history and the indifference to history of Taralfo's faith. Florio and Biancifiore themselves encounter an old battlefield. On their pilgrimage to Compostela, the two come upon the site of the slaughter of Lelio's men, a field of the dead described earlier in the *Filocolo* in terms that strongly evoke Lucan.²³² The lovers gather up the Christian bones, using divinely provided colors to separate the human bones from those of dead horses, and send them back to Rome. Florio and Biancifiore are able to organize the past, make sense of it, and assign it a good ending. In this final battlefield scene, Christianity provides a redemptive perspective on history, providing a place for human action to operate in harmony with the divine structure of time, avoiding indifference and circularity.

Indifference to time seems to be a distinct possibility for the reader of Menedon's Question. Although the Question's reader cannot enjoy the garden itself, he or she can take pleasure in the lengthy description of its creation. Boccaccio generates a lengthy and fanciful account of the spell that Tebano uses to create the garden by translating from Ovid's description of Medea's spellcasting in Book Seven of the *Metamorphoses*. The Ovidian passage depicts Medea using her magic to extend her father-in-law Aeson's lifespan. Boccaccio translates much of it closely: he takes from Ovid a prayer to Hecate, Night, and the Stars, as well as the arrival of a chariot to collect the ingredients for his spell. But Boccaccio makes some significant changes to Ovid. Whereas in the *Metamorphoses*, Medea's journey is limited to Northern Greece and Boetia, Boccaccio's

²³² Cf. McGregor, *The Image of Antiquity*, 130-131.

Tebano visits Pelion, Othrys, Ossa, Mount Nero, Pacchino, Pelorus, and the Apennines, a catalogue that couples Greek mountains with peaks in Italy and Africa (4.31.29).²³³ A subsequent catalogue of rivers includes journeys to France, Italy, Russia, and Germany. The vast scope of this list reflects the landscape of Boccaccio's reading. As Branca observes, the three Italian mountains that Boccaccio adds, Pacchino, Peloro, and Appennino, are all mentioned in Dante.²³⁴ Boccaccio's additions to the catalogue of rivers, meanwhile, evoke contexts within the *Filocolo* itself. Tebano's magical journey becomes virtually coterminous with Boccaccio's textual journey. It transcends geographical boundaries, occupying a primarily literary significance. Like the May Garden itself, the account of its creation appears to depart from normal narrative unities, instead focusing on the pleasure of literary spaces.

Boccaccio's intimation that this journey actually has a significant timeline, however, moves towards recognizing a redemptive Christian structure hidden beneath even the most distracting digressions. Despite taking freedoms with Tebano's destinations, Boccaccio is specific about the time that the journey takes. Medea's chariot ride lasts nine days and nights, but Tebano completes the creation of the garden before the close of the third day ("non essendo ancora passato il terzo giorno") (IV.31.31). When Tebano completes the garden and returns to Taralfo, he finds the latter "quasi pauroso d'essere stato da lui [Tebano] beffato per la lunga dimoranza dimorava" ("somewhat afraid of having been tricked by him during this long wait") (IV.31.36).

²³³ Branca's notes summarize Boccaccio's changes. As he notes, Boccaccio probably read *Ochrysque* for *Othrysque*, meaning that he retains three of Ovid's mountains. Cf. *Tutte le opere*, vol. 1 IV.31.29n35.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

Taralfo suffers during the creation of the garden; the reader or listener, meanwhile, might be transported by it and forget about time altogether. Yet when read from a Christian perspective, the timing of the garden's creation is itself significant. The three-day time unit transforms Taralfo's wait into more than simply lost time: instead, the resurrection of Spring in January hints at the resurrection of Christ.

Boccaccio was not the first medieval reader to recognize the Christological implications of Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson. In the original Ovidian episode, Medea kills Aeson, draining his blood before replacing it with his potion and thus bringing him back to youth. The author of the *Ovide moralisé* reads this as a sign of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. As Joel Feimer summarizes, "the cauldron and the potion by means of which Jason's father Aeson is rejuvenated become images of the sacrament of Baptism and the power of God's grace through which Christ achieves the miracle of redemption."²³⁵ The allegorical interpretation produced in the *Ovide moralisé* rests on the single image of Aeson killed and rejuvenated. Boccaccio, even once he eliminates the element of resurrection from the passage, retains the timeline associated with it. He shows how the resurrection provides us with a means of reading and interpreting the passage of time.

²³⁵ Joen N. Feimer, "Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the *Ovide moralisé*: Translation as Transmission" *Florilegium* 8 (1986): 40-55, at 51. Cf. Cornelis De Boer, Martina D. De Boer, and Jeannette Th. M. Van 't Sant, eds, "*Ovide moralisé*": *poème du commencement du quatorzième siècle publié d'après tous les manuscrits connus*, vol. III (Amsterdam: J. Müller, 1931). 7.1081-1246.

Boccaccio's own explicit interpretation of the Ovidian Aeson episode in the *Genealogie deorum gentilium* does not emphasize a Christian meaning at all, instead focusing on the way time is experienced and interpreted. Boccaccio explains,

Cuius fictionis talis potest esse sensus: Ensoni scilicet ex insperato reditu filii tam difficilis expeditionis gloriosi, tam grandis letitia addita est, ut etas, que tendebet in mortem, in etatem retrocessisse floridam videretur.²³⁶

[The sense of the story is this: For Aeson, due to the unforeseen return of his son, glorious from such a difficult undertaking, such great happiness multiplied that his old age, which was approaching death, seemed as it were to flow back to vigorous youth.]

Boccaccio, for whom the classical poets are to be admired as philosophers even if they are limited by their pagan perspective, does not invent the same Christian underpinnings for the Aeson story as does the poet of the *Ovide moralisé*.²³⁷ Instead, he focuses on how the story gives insight into human perception. Boccaccio's approach is set into relief by the reading produced by Giovanni del Virgilio, whose commentary on Ovid is nearly contemporary with *Il Filocolo*. Giovanni also rationalizes the myth in secular terms, explaining,

Nam dum Eson uideret filium uenisse cum tam magnis diuitiis et tam pucra uxore ita gauisus est quod uidebatur iuuenis esse. Quod Medea quia magica erat sciebat facere aliquas medicinas cum quibus ipse Eson manebat in bona etate. Nam hoc sciunt facere medici. Vnde dictum est, arte nurus magice uixit yocundior eson. Et redit in iuuenem prosperitate senex.²³⁸

²³⁶ Vittore Branca, ed., *Tutte le opera di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 8 (Milan, 1998), XIII.25.2. My translation.

²³⁷ Cf. the summary of the relationship between poetry, theology, and philosophy in the *Genealogie* in Alastair Minnis, A. B. Scott, with David Wallace, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism: c. 1100-1375*, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

²³⁸ My transcription and translation based on Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Plut. 36 16, f. 81r. I have modernized capitalization and punctuation and expanded abbreviations silently. On the composition and dating of the *Allegorie*, cf. Minnis and Scott, with Wallace, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory*, 316-317 and 360-366.

For when Aeson saw his son arrive with such great riches and such a beautiful wife he rejoiced so much that he seemed to be young. For Medea, insofar as she was a sorceress, knew how to make medicines with which Aeson stayed in good health. For doctors know how to do this. Whence it is said, Aeson lived more delightfully through the magical art of his daughter-in-law. And the old man returned to youth through good fortune.

Although Giovanni also reads the episode in secular terms, he simply equates Medea's magic with medicine, focusing on science rather than perception. Boccaccio's reading, however, shifts the kinds of agency at stake in the episode. His emphasis on Aeson's perspective reduces Medea's active role in the rejuvenation. Instead of depicting time as something that a magician—or doctor—can alter, Boccaccio presents it as subject to interpretation. The *Genealogie* were written several decades later than the *Filocolo*, but Boccaccio emphasizes the same strong connection between time and interpretation in each text. In both cases, time attains shape and meaning depending on how it is read, and when, and by whom.

If time must be interpreted, who is best able to read it? The *Filocolo*'s emphasis on the Christian calendar, its achievement of historical perspective through conversion, and its account of pilgrimage completed advance the Christian perspective achieved at the story's ending as a privileged interpretive vantage point. As Victoria Kirkham shows, the sense of historical perspective that Florio gains in his conversion parallels the narrative perspective that the reader gains upon finishing *Il Filocolo*. As Kirkham explains, "the original major digressions in the *Filocolo* all achieve their resolution

through a variation on the theme of recantation and conversion.”²³⁹ She shows that this pattern appears in microcosm within the *Questioni d’amore* themselves, which involve two recantations of their own secular approach to love. Even within Menedon’s Question, Boccaccio explores how the moment of recantation provides new interpretive perspectives. When the lady’s husband offers her to Taralfo, the latter suddenly considers the generosity shown him and returns her unharmed. Tebano, meanwhile, rejects payment for his work, explaining, “oltre che a tutte le cose del mondo mi piace averti servito” (“more than anything else in the world, it pleases me to have been of service to you”) (IV.31.53). Nothing in Menedon’s Question ultimately changes hands besides time and labor. Tebano’s response justifies and redeems the way that he has spent both. Here, as elsewhere in *Il Filocolo*, the perspective achieved by recantation and conversion allows characters to mark a sharp boundary point for their own histories and in doing this, to look back upon the past and understand it.

Boccaccio thus uses conversion to achieve a sense of completeness to the past, one that allows for the creation of interpretive perspectives on history. But time does not stop passing after the conversion to Christianity. As Chapter One of this dissertation emphasizes, Chaucer’s poetry shows a strong sense of its own embeddedness within a constantly changing vernacular. To understand how his poetry describes this kind of change, it may be instructive to return in more detail to Ovid’s account of Medea’s magic in *Metamorphoses* Seven. Ovid takes up a similar problem to that explored in *Il Filocolo*. Just as Boccaccio’s account of the May Garden imagines an escape from a sense of time,

²³⁹ Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular*, 198.

Ovid's description of Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson potentially imagines a way of resisting change, insofar as it undoes the transformation of youth into old age. Medea's magic thus pushes against the constant transformation that characterizes the *Metamorphoses*, but Ovid pushes back. I will propose that Ovid uses poetic form to overcome her efforts at achieving stasis and incorporate her magic into a narrative of forward movement in time.

Form serves as a means of integrating Medea's chaotic power into a linear movement. Medea describes her magic as, when it makes any sense at all, recursive. She lists a series of unnatural achievements in her invocation of Night, the Stars, Hecate, and other natural powers:

quorum ope, cum volui, ripis mirantibus amnes
in fontes rediere suos, concussaue sisto,
stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello
nubilaque induco, ventos abigoque vocoque,
vipereas rumpo verbis et carmine fauces,
vivaque saxa sua convulsaue robora terra
et silvas moveo iubeoque tremescere montis
et mugire solum manesque exire sepulcris.
(VII.199-206)²⁴⁰

With your help when I have willed it, the streams have run back to their fountain-heads, while the banks wondered; I lay the swollen, and stir up the calm seas by my spell; I drive the clouds and bring on the clouds; the winds I dispel and summon; I break the jaws of serpents with my incantations; living rocks and oaks I root up from their soil; I move the forests, I bid the mountains shake, the earth to rumble, and the ghosts to come forth from their tombs.

Frank Justus Miller's translation of this passage renders it in a dramatic series of clauses.

The Latin, meanwhile, uses a proliferation of conjunctions to string together Medea's

²⁴⁰ Text and translation of the *Metamorphoses* from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, with translation by Frank Justice Miller (Cambridge, MA, 1921).

dramatic account of her own disorderly power. These connections mean that even as Medea describes disorderly, recursive acts, her language mutates between different patterns. The chiasmus of “nubileque induco, ventos abigoque” loses its unity and transforms into a list with the addition of “vocoque.” At the same time, a new pattern begins, with the alliteration on “ventos,” “vocoque,” and “Vipereas” in the following line. Her magic emerges as part of a larger formal movement. Ovid’s language emphasizes a continuity of change, simultaneously disrupting and creating patterns.

Medea’s language, her personality, and even the elements of her spell become caught up in change over the course of the Aeson episode. Jason is responsible for initially convincing Medea to help Aeson, and as Charles Segal points out, he does so in terms that recall her earlier magic.²⁴¹ Appealing to his wife’s vanity, he asks her, “si tamen hoc possunt (quid enim non carmina possunt?) / deme meis annis et demptos adde parenti!” (VII.166-67). (“If your spells can do this—and what can they not do?—take some portion from my own years and give this to my father.”) His words echo the language that Ovid uses earlier to describe Medea’s helpful magic in Colchis: “tantum medicamina possunt” (“so much can potions do”) (VII.116). Jason marshals the events of the past into new rhetorical form. Meanwhile, his request helps to accelerate Medea’s own moral transformation. After rejuvenating Aeson, she will use the promise of the same spell to trick Peleus’s daughters into patricide.²⁴² And finally, the materials of

²⁴¹ Charles Segal, “Black and White Magic in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: Passion, Love, and Art,” *Arion*, 3rd series, vol. 9 (2002): 1-34, at 13.

²⁴² Cf. Segal, “Black and White,” 11-19. See also Judith A. Rosner-Siegel, “Metamorphosis and Magic: Ovid’s Medea (*Met.* 7.1-424),” *The Classical Journal*, 77 (1982): 231-243.

Medea's magic are themselves susceptible to taking on new associations. As Ovid observes, the herbs that she takes from the shores of the Anthedon will later initiate the transformation of Glaucus into a sea god:

Carpsit et Euboica vivax Anthedone gramen,
nondum mutato vulgatum corpore Glauci.
(VII.232-33)

From Euboean Anthedon she culled a grass that gives long life, a herb not yet made famous by the change which it produced in Glaucus's body.

In the thirteenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes how the fisherman Glaucus eats the grass on the banks of the Anthedon, which transform him into a sea god. Medea's language, her magic, and even the landscape she moves in are involved in processes of transformation.

In order to describe this constant change, Ovid establishes a moving poetic perspective. At the conclusion of Medea's spell, Aeson's throat has been slit and his blood drained. Medea pours her potion into his body through his mouth and his wounds. The various parts of the old man return to life, and suddenly Aeson returns to himself. Ovid describes this series of events with a poetic flourish, shifting the subject of his clauses as he accounts for the different perspectives coming into and out of being in the scene.

stricto Medea recludit
ense senis iugulum veteremque exire cruorem
passa replete sucis; quos postquam conbibit Aeson
aut ore acceptos aut vulnere, barba comaeque
canitie posita nigrum rapuere colorem,
pulsa fugit macies, abeunt pallorque situsque,
adiectoque cavae supplentur corpore rugae,
membraque luxuriant: Aeson miratur et olim
ante quarter denos hunc se reminiscitur annos.

Medea unsheathed her knife and cut the old man's throat; then, letting the old blood all run out, she filled his veins with her brew. When Aeson had drunk this in part through his lips and part through his wound, his beard and hair lost their hoary grey and quickly became black again; his leanness vanished, away went the pallor and the look of neglect, the deep wrinkles were filled out with new flesh, his limbs had the strength of youth. Aeson was filled with wonder, and remembered that this was he forty years ago.

Ovid describes each of Aeson's various parts returning to youth. His frailty flees; his pallor vanishes. Poetry allows the reader to glimpse this transformation broken into its constituent parts. But the most remarkable change comes when Aeson himself reawakens and sees what has happened. As William S. Anderson notes, Ovid modifies his typical technique of technique of describing a metamorphosis from the perspective of astonished onlookers.²⁴³ Aeson becomes both subject and object of the sentence. His strange, divided perspective on himself appears to have disoriented some scribes. Anderson points out that in almost all of the manuscripts, "hunc" is copied as "nunc." This modification suggests the desire for a stable perspective—a "now"—from which to view the changes created by Medea's spell.²⁴⁴ But Ovid constantly alters the perspective of his poetry to reflect the changing world that he describes.

Throughout this episode, Medea uses the word *carmen* to describe her spell, the same term that Ovid uses for the *Metamorphoses* itself. This similarity in terminology underscores oppositions between spell and poem. Whereas Medea attempts to resist the flow of time, Ovid helps the reader to experience it. However, the two converge in their

²⁴³ William S. Anderson, ed., *Ovid's Metamorphoses: Books 6-10* (Norman, OK, 1972), 275.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

association with the most basic expression of the passage of time: the sun's movement across the sky. Medea's ambitious attempt to manipulate time by rejuvenating Aeson takes on added significance in the context of her genealogy: she is the granddaughter of the Sun, and in Greek poetry, she is associated with the cycles of day, night, and the seasons.²⁴⁵ Indeed, as Alain Moreau points out, the chariot of dragons that carries her away in Euripides' *Medea*—and that reappears in Ovid—resembles that used by Demeter.²⁴⁶ In Euripides, the chariot is a gift from the Sun, its grotesque form a sharp contrast to the horse-drawn chariot of Helios. Medea's attempts to resist the linear movement of growth and reproduction—by rejuvenating an old man, by tricking Pelius's daughters into murdering their own father, and by killing her own children—are directly opposed not only by Ovid's poetry, but also by the constant, predictable movement of her own grandfather through the sky.

Indeed, Ovid's own articulation of the constancy of change sets the stage for the association of his poetry with the sun's chariot. In the famous Book Fifteen speech on change that Ovid assigns to Pythagoras, references to Helios's chariot appear twice. The first serves as a reminder that poetry cannot transcend time. Like everything else, the time of poetry eventually comes to an end:

Desinet ante dies et in alto Phoebus anhelos
aequore tinguet equos, quam consequar omnia verbis
in species translata novas: sic tempora verti
cerniamus atque illas adsumere robora gentes,
concidere has; sic magna fuit censuque virisque
perque decem potuit tantum dare sanguinis annos,

²⁴⁵ Alain Moreau, *Le Mythe de Jason et Médée: La va-nu-pied et la sorcière* (Paris, 1994), 111.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

nunc humilis veteres tantummodo Troia ruinas
et pro divitiis tumulos ostendit avorum.

(XV.418-25)

The day will come to an end and Phoebus will bathe his panting horses in the deep waters of the sea before I tell of all the things which have assumed new forms. So we see times changing, and some nations putting on new strength and others falling into weakness. So was Troy great in wealth and men, and for ten years was able to give so freely of her blood; but now, humbled to earth, she has naught to show but ancient ruins, no wealth but ancestral tombs.

The passage serves as a reminder that even the ways that we measure time are, themselves, enclosed within history. Poetry ends, and so do the political powers that define periods in history. Poetry, however, may be special in its ability to describe the transition from one time to another. After dwelling for several lines on Troy, Pythagoras insists that his own speech move forward, invoking the consistency of the sun's chariot:

Ne tamen oblitus ad metam tendere longe
exspatiemur equis, caelum et quodcumque sub illo est,
immutat formas, tellusque et quicquid in illa est.

(XV.453-55)

But, not to wander too far out of my course, my steeds forgetting meanwhile to speed towards the goal, the heavens and whatever is beneath the heavens change their forms, the earth and all that is within it.

Poetry, like Helios's chariot, is consistent in its articulation of the transition from moment to moment. The constancy of poetry in this respect represents a paradoxical exception to the rule of change. As Ovid insists that everything changes forms, his discourse becomes increasingly abstract. The parallelism of "quodcumque sub illo est," encompassing everything beneath the sky, and "quicquid in illa est," describing everything in the earth, allows poetry to intimate fullness that evacuates specificity from the subjects it describes. The verbal parallelism of these two lines amplifies Ovid's metrical play on pattern and

variation. Line 454 consists of dactyls and spondees; line 455 is entirely spondees until its final two feet. Both lines end with the standard dactyl and final two-syllable foot, made emphatic by the near perfect lexical correspondence between the two lines. Poetry involves the experience of difference, as each line gives way to the next, but also of an overarching consistency, as each line ultimately answers the reader's metrical expectations and sets the stage for the next verse. Here, poetry regulates the movement from moment to moment, as if change itself could be comprehended as a poetic form.

Although neither Medea's spell nor Boccaccio's May Garden survive in Chaucer's rewriting of Menedon's Question, questions of the forms that govern the world do. Whereas Boccaccio and Ovid focus on the form of temporality, Chaucer's most explicit focus is on our relationship with the physical world. Dorigen's hatred of the black rocks off the coast of Brittany generates a meditation on the wisdom of divine providence. Dorigen longs for a world that is regulated in a way that she can understand:

Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
In ydel, as men seyn, ye no thyng make.
But, Lord, thise grisly feedly rokkes blake,
That semen rather a foul confusion
Of werk than any fair creacion
Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable?
(V.65-872)

At first blush, Dorigen's desire seems very different from, for example, that of the Lady in Menedon's Question. Instead of asking for the creation of a space that escapes the

normal passage of the seasons, Dorigen desires a hyper-regulation of the natural world. She desires a “fair creacion” in which everything moves according to a comprehensible “governaunce” and in which nothing is “unresonable.” Yet the desire to comprehend the workings of a “parfit wys God” is itself overly ambitious and out of order. It resembles the request for the May Garden in its attempt to extend control and a false notion of stability over the workings of the natural world.²⁴⁷

Once Aurelius considers how to get rid of the rocks, it becomes evident that Dorigen’s discomfort with the black rocks potentially extends to include a desire to control even the way time is experienced. At a loss for how to make the rocks disappear, Aurelius prays to Apollo, whom he identifies with the sun:

Appollo, god and governour
Of every plaunte, herbe, tree, and flour,
That yevest, after thy declinacion,
To ech of hem his tyme and his seson,
As thyn heberwe chaungeth lowe or heighe.
(V.1031-35)

Apollo is responsible for the changing seasons, establishing a natural law in which the plants and trees are able to find their “tyme” for growth and decay. Dorigen’s request, by contrast, spurs Aurelius to imagine disrupting the astronomical cycles that regulate the natural world. As his prayer continues, he asks for Apollo to mediate a request to Lucina, the moon. As he observes, the moon goddess is “emperisse” of the sea above Neptune and can therefore manipulate the tides. Aurelius proposes that Apollo ask Lucina to slow her course to match that of her brother. He prays for this to happen when the sun is in

²⁴⁷ On the importance of perception (as opposed to truth) in the *Tale*, cf. Carolyn Collette “Seeing and Believing in the *Franklin’s Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 26 (1992): 395-410.

Leo, and the moon in opposition to it, in Aquarius. In this arrangement the moon will be full and the tides high, and when the moon slows to move together with the sun, the high tide will persist unnaturally: “thane shal she been evene atte fulle always, / And spryng flood laste bothe nyght and day” (1069-70). The rocks would be covered over, and Dorigen’s fear would be abated. This prayer epitomizes the Boethian notion that human desires are out of sync with the providential order of the world. In Chapter Two of this dissertation, for example, I discussed Book Two, Meter Eight of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which concludes with the lament, “O weleful were mankynde, yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede yowr corages” (*Boece* 2m8.25-26). Dorigen’s fear, along with Aurelius’s elaborate attempt to respond to it, embodies this misdirected love. Dorigen’s very desire for order moves against natural cycles of the days, months, and seasons.

In Chapter Two, I discussed how poetry uses its own organization to intimate this overarching providential order. *The Franklin’s Tale* takes up this question alongside a related concern. How does poetry—or any speech—know its own time? If the motions of the sun and moon set a “tyme” for plant and animal life, can they help determine the right time for poetry (and other kinds of human action) as well? Whereas Aurelius recognizes that the Sun gives a time to the plants and trees, when it comes to his own speech, he is attentive to contingency and opportunity. Aurelius makes his entry into the *Tale* displaying the customary reticence of the lover: he loves Dorigen “two yeer and moore,” but never dares to tell her (V.940). However, during Arveragus’s absence, he seizes his moment. As Chaucer explains, Dorigen and Aurelius begin speaking at a party,

proving the opportunity to raise the subject of love: “They fille in speche; and forth,
moore and moore, / Into his purpose drough Aurelius, / And whan he saugh his tyme, he
seyde thus [. . .]” (V.964-66). Aurelius has a strong sense of how his own speech works
within context. He recognizes the rhetorical value of his situation and, when he sees “his
tyme” he speaks. The same sense of opportunity dictates Aurelius’s announcement to
Dorigen that he has successfully hidden the rocks. He waits in a spot where he is likely to
see her, and then “whan he saugh his tyme, anon-right hee, / With dredful herte and with
ful humble cheere, / Salewed hath his sovereyn lady deere” (V.1310). Aurelius’s timing
embodies what David Wallace describes as “*kairos*: the timeliness of an utterance and its
appropriateness to the particular circumstances obtaining at the moment of speaking.”²⁴⁸
This is time read from a practical perspective, one that considers the contingencies of
social context.

Certain passages within *The Franklin’s Tale* hint at a different approach to time,
one that strives for a kind of objective propriety. The clerk of Orleans is constantly
concerned with being timely. The display of illusions that he creates for Aurelius and his
brother ends abruptly: “whan this maister that this magyk wroughte / Saugh it was tyme,
he clapte his handes two / And farewell! Al oure revel was ago” (V.1200-1204). Does the
clerk act on a sense of social mores or on a larger understanding of how time passes?
Chaucer’s switch into the first person plural to bid farewell to the illusions seems almost
to suggest the nostalgia of an *ubi sunt* poem. The clerk’s timing resonates beyond its
immediate social context, intimating a relationship towards a relationship with the past

²⁴⁸ Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 233.

defined by loss. And once the clerk arrives in Brittany, he strives for an understanding of how time works in nature. His first urgent task is to wait for the proper time to act. But he does this not through a sense of social timing, but through careful astrological measurement:

This subtil clerk swich routhe had of this man
That nyght and day he spedde hym that he kan
To wayten a tyme of his conclusioun;
This is to seye, to maken illusioun,
By swich an apparence or jogelrye—
I ne kan no termes of astrologye—
That she and every wight shoulde wene and seye
That of Britaigne the rokkes were aweye,
Or ellis they were sonken under grounde.
(V.1261-68)

The clerk's actual "magic" may involve carefully measuring the tides, as Karla Taylor proposes.²⁴⁹ Whereas Aurelius imagines manipulating the tides to accomplish his goal, the clerk attempts to understand natural cycles and inscribe his own work within them. His sense of timing also differs from Aurelius's emphasis on rhetorical and social context. The clerk seeks not "his" time but "a" time, as though aiming to transcend context and discover the underlying cycles that order time.²⁵⁰

The Franklin dismisses all of this as "supersticious cursednesse," but the clerk's basic purpose—understanding time's organization—shares elements with the goals of

²⁴⁹ Karla Taylor, "Chaucer's Uncommon Voice," 73.

²⁵⁰ The differing approaches to time that intersect in *The Franklin's Tale* may be in conversation with the famously differing approaches to "trouthe" explored in the poem. The contrast between Aurelius's contextualized, social timing and the clerk's striving for objectivity might be plotted against the ethical sense of "trouthe" ("fidelity, loyalty,") versus the intellectual sense, originally described with the term *sothe* ("correspondence to reality, accuracy.") Cf. Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia, 1999), 9, 13-19, 24-31.

Christian history (V.1272). As Steele Nowlin notes, *The Franklin's Tale* is haunted by the Christological unit of three days. Arveragus travels in England "two yeer" (V.813); Aurelius lays "in languor" for Dorigen "two yeer and moore" (1101-2); the clerk's magic makes the rocks disappear "for a wyke or tweye" (V.1295).²⁵¹ The Franklin himself initiates the *Tale* by breaking off the Squire two lines after the heading "*incipit pars tercia*" (V.670). The *Tale*'s resolution begins with the arrival of Arveragus "upon the thridde nyght" (V.1459). The liturgical calendar reveals itself in more specific ways as well: Russell Peck calculates that Dorigen's Complaint occurs on the eve of Epiphany.²⁵² Nowlin proposes that these patterns "sugges[t] the imposition of a Christian time frame onto the pagan world of the tale."²⁵³ Indeed, as the *Filocolo*'s pilgrimage narrative suggests, such time might not need to be "imposed." It might be there all along, waiting to be discovered once time is read from a post-conversionary perspective.

The trouble with occupying any such stable perspective is the possibility of ongoing change from moment to moment. As the *Metamorphoses* shows, poetry has the potential to help us experience the constant passage of time, our own inability to occupy a single, stable moment. In *The Franklin's Tale*, this trouble with the present becomes apparent in Dorigen's Complaint, a passage that has often been read as an inconvenient

²⁵¹ Steele Nowlin, "Between Precedent and Possibility: Liminality, Historicity, and Narrative in Chaucer's *The Franklin's Tale*," *Studies in Philology* 103.1 (2006): 47-67, at 62.

²⁵² Russell A. Peck, "Sovereignty and the Two Worlds of the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 1 (1967): 253-271, at 270.

²⁵³ Nowlin, "Between," 62.

and unwieldy interruption of the narrative of *The Franklin's Tale*.²⁵⁴ However, as Susan Crane observes, the Complaint has a significant effect on the *Tale*'s timing. Dorigen's indecision and passivity "buy[s] time."²⁵⁵ Indeed, Dorigen's rash promise to Aurelius not only assures him that she will love him, but also that she will do so punctually: "what day that endelong Britayne / Ye remoeve alle the rokkes [. . .] / Thanne wol I love yow best of any man" (V.992-997). For Dorigen, responding to Aurelius's success would mean acknowledging that this very "day" has arrived. She responds to this possibility with an account of virtuous women that delays both the action within the story and the reader's progress through the narrative. As Emma Lipton explains, Chaucer manipulates the relationship between "the duration of the purported events of the narrative" ("story-time") and the time that it takes to read the *Tale* ("discourse-time"), sometimes setting the two into opposition and at other points allowing them to coincide.²⁵⁶ As Dorigen utters her complaint, the poem's discursive timing and the timing of the event depicted within it

²⁵⁴ See for example Morton W. Bloomfield, "The Franklin's Tale: A Story of Unanswered Questions," in Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk, eds., *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in its Contexts 700-1600* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982). Bloomfield summarizes critical perplexity at the complaint before comparing it to moments of "formal variation: in Chaucer's other works (193). The Complaint has been defended on the basis of both Chaucer's dramatic sense and his medieval rhetorical skill. For the former argument, see James Sledd, "Dorigen's Complaint," *Modern Philology* 45.1 (Aug., 1947): 36-45. For the latter, see Gerald Morgan who argues that the passage has suffered from "notably unsympathetic modern commentators." "A Defence of Dorigen's Complaint," *Medium Aevum* 46 (1977): 77-97, at 97.

²⁵⁵ Susan Crane, "The Franklin as Dorigen," *Chaucer Review* 24.3 (Winter, 1990): 236-252, at 248.

²⁵⁶ Emma Lipton, *Affections of the Mind: The Politics of Sacramental Marriage in Late Medieval English Literature* (Notre Dame, IN, 2007), 33. Cf. also Judith Ferster, "Interpretation and Imitation in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*" in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History* (New York, NY, 1986), 148-68, and Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction* (Ithaca, NY, 1978).

become inseparable. The poem unfolds as Dorigen speaks. Dorigen thus appears briefly to appropriate for herself poetry's ability to mediate the movement of time from one moment to the next. Indeed, I will suggest that her Complaint uses poetic form to avoid settling within Aurelius's promised "day." The Complaint refuses to know itself within a specific moment.

Paradoxically, Dorigen begins her Complaint with a series of exempla that highlight timely action. The first six of Dorigen's "stories" all describe action that begins with a specific moment in political history, often introduced using temporal language. The series begins, "whan thritty tirauntz, full of cursednesse, / Hadde slayn Phidon in Atthenes ate feste" (V. 1368-69). Chaucer's translation of the *Adversus Jovinianum* here closely follows Jerome, who writes, "Triginta Atheniensium, cum Phidonem necessent in convivio."²⁵⁷ In switching from inflected syntax to uninflected, Chaucer moves the relative adverb "when" to the beginning of the sentence, a change that increases emphasis on the moment of action. Still translating Jerome closely, Chaucer reiterates the language of time throughout the opening six exempla.²⁵⁸ The maiden Stymphalides installs herself in Diana's temple "whan that her fader slayn was on a night" (1391). Hasdrubales wife slays herself and her children "when she saugh that Romyans wan the toun" (V1401). Lucrece slays herself "whan that she oppressed was / Of Tarquin" (V.1406-07). The

²⁵⁷ Ralph Hanna III and Traugott Lawler, eds., *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, vol. 2, (Athens, GA, 1997), 77.

²⁵⁸ Donald C. Baker has proposed that the timing of suicide is a central concern throughout these examples. Noting that, unlike most of the other women, Lucrece commits suicide after rape, he proposes that Dorigen "is not wondering *whether* to commit suicide, but [. . .] asking herself *when*." See "A Crux in Chaucer's 'Franklin's Tale': Dorigen's Complaint," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 60.1 (1961): 56-64, at 62.

women in Dorigen's exempla interrupt the forward movement of imperial violence. Their deaths put an end to change, isolate individual moments of resistance, and create an alternative historiography.

In the very process of describing this decisive action, Dorigen uses language to avoid coming to terms with her own present moment. As Catherine Sanok has shown, the discourse of exemplarity has a tendency to cast the distance between past and present into relief. Medieval women readers of saints' lives were not encouraged to imitate the militant virginity of the Roman saints, but rather to imitate the saint in forms acceptable to their own society.²⁵⁹ Dorigen, similarly, cannot translate the exempla of female suicide directly to her own situation. The "when" of Aurelius's removal of the rocks lacks the imperial context and the physical horror of the "when" of the first six *exempla*. But Dorigen never even reaches the point of comparing her moment to that of these women, for she never settles herself within a single moment at all. As she transitions between exempla and her own situation, her grammar moves dexterously from past to future, avoiding the present tense: "What sholde I mo ensamples hereof sayn, / [. . .] / I wol conclude that it is bet for me / To sleyn myself than be defouled thus. / I wol be trewe to Arveragus" (V.1419-1424). The timely action of women of the past reveal the extent to which Dorigen avoids knowing herself within a single, decisive moment.

The second half of the complaint continues to use language in order to avoid occupying a particular "now." As Chaucer translates more loosely from Jerome, he

²⁵⁹ Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2007).

manipulates poetic structures of recollection and expectation.²⁶⁰ For example, the seventh to tenth exempla are all tightly interconnected by rhetorical troping and rhyme scheme:

I wol be trewe to Arveragus,
Or rather sleen myself in some manere,
As dide Demociones doghter deere
By cause that she wolde nat defouled be.
O Cedasus, it is ful greet pitee
To redden how thy doghtren deyde, allas,
That slowe himself for swich manere cas.
As greet a pitee was it, or wel moore,
The Theban mayden that for Nichanore
Hirselven slow, right for swich manere wo.
Another Theban mayden dide right so;
For oon of Macidonye hadde hire oppressed,
She with hire deeth hir maydenhede redressed. (V.1424-1436)

The series of exempla begins as part of one long either-or sentence. But, in a recapitulation of the overall digressive structure of the Complaint, the seemingly unavoidable choice outlined in its first two lines quickly gives way to an analogy (beginning “as dide Demociones doghter”). The Complaint also uses the anticipatory structure of rhyme to generate its forward movement. Dorigen begins her new exemplum as a continuation of the couplet begun in line 1425. The story of Demotion’s daughter extends two lines, leaving “be” in line 1427 unrhymed and setting the stage for another story. The account of Cedasus’s (Scedasus’s) daughter ends with a complete couplet, but connects with the next example through comparison. Chaucer highlights this incessant forward movement with the internal rhyme in line 1433. The rhyme on “slow [. . .] wo” simultaneously encapsulates the exemplum and propels the Complaint into the next line, which completes the couplet with a third rhyme introducing another Theban maiden. The

²⁶⁰ Cf. Ralph Hanna III and Traugott Lawler, eds., *Jankyn’s Book*, 76-79, on Chaucer’s translation techniques.

story of this nameless woman concludes with rime riche on “oppressed / redressed,” suggesting the reciprocal violence at the heart of the exemplum. In short, the passage uses the formal expectations generated by rhyme and by grammar in order to transition between examples. The passage moves incessantly forward, always transitioning and never settling within a single, decisive present.

As the Complaint continues, Chaucer calls attention less to the content of Dorigen’s musings than to their form. The final exempla gradually extricate themselves from the detail that characterizes the opening of the digression, reducing the description of each woman until Chaucer manages to fit three names into the final two lines:

The parfit wyfhood of Arthemesie
Honored is thurgh al the Barbarie.
O Teuta, queene, thy wyfly chastitee
To alle wyves may a mirour bee.
The same thyng I seye of Bilyea,
Of Rodogone, and eek Valeria. (V.1451-1456)

The concluding lines of Dorigen’s Complaint omit any potentially interesting detail, calling attention away from the women listed and towards the form of the list itself. The rhyme on “Bilyea” / “Valeria,” neither of whom receive any description at all, creates a sense of formal completeness even as it moves away from relevant content. Bilyea, for example, is famous only for enduring her husband’s bad breath. As critics including Donald Baker have emphasized, the complaint has strong thematic organization: Dorigen moves from unmarried suicides to wives who commit suicide to good wives who survive.²⁶¹ But these lines do not explain who Bilyea and Rodogone are, placing emphasis less on this thematic movement than on the self-perpetuating property of the

²⁶¹ Donald C. Baker, “A Crux,” op., cit.

rhymed list. The Complaint could, potentially, continue forever, substituting the expectation and recollection generated by rhyme and meter for other forms of responding to the past and moving into the future. Indeed, in reducing history to pure form in this way, Dorigen recapitulates the desire to comprehend and control providence that characterizes her distress over the rocks. As noted earlier, there is a fine line between discovering the shape of time and regulating one possible shape for time. Dorigen, with her overriding desire for comprehensible order, uses poetic form to accomplish the latter.

As noted above, Ovid's poetry verges on representing time as pure form, giving to change a paradoxical stability. But the *Metamorphoses* also carries hints that change is not always smooth and ideal: as poetry assimilates material, it alters its own expressive vocabulary. Similarly, Dorigen's Complaint uses poetic form to perform a constant movement from past to future. But like the black rocks on the coast of Brittany, the partially visible history of Chaucer's poetic language undoes her efforts to create a smooth, comprehensible movement from past to future. The glosses placed in the margins of many *Franklin's Tale* manuscripts call attention to Chaucer's adaptation of Jerome. As John Manly and Edith Rickert's research shows, the *Tale* has five glosses that appear in Elsmere, Hengwrt, and numerous other manuscripts. From this evidence, Manly and Rickert propose that these glosses may have appeared in the archetype.²⁶² Two of these glosses provide brief explication of mythological references: "lucyna i. luna" and "Ianus biceps" or "Ianus bifrons" on Chaucer's description of "Janus [. . .] with double berd" (V.1252). Three of them provide information about Chaucer's sources. Next to the

²⁶² All quotations of *The Franklin's Tale* glosses refer to Manly and Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, 512-515.

Franklin's claim that "I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso" are corresponding lines from the prologue to Persius's *Satires* (V.721). Next to Dorigen's first exemplum, the story of Phidon's daughters, is Jerome's version:

Atheniensium tiranni cum Phidonem necassent in conuiuio filias eius virgines ad se venire iusserunt et scortorum more nudari ac super pauimenta patris sanguine cruentatas inpudicis gestibus ludere que paulisper dissimulato dolore cum timulentos [for "temulentos"] conuiuias cernerent quasi ad requisita nature egredientes inuicem se complexere precipitauerunt in puteum vt virginitatem morte seruarent.

When the tyrants of Athens had killed Phidon at a banquet, they commanded his virgin daughters to come before them and to be stripped naked like whores, and romp with lewd gestures on the floor soaked with their father's blood; the daughters for a short time concealed their sorrow, but when they saw that the diners were drunk, they went out as if to relieve themselves, then put their arms around each other and threw themselves into a well so as to save their virginity by dying.²⁶³

Finally, multiple manuscripts also include a second gloss on Dorigen's Complaint referring the reader to Jerome for more exempla: "Singulas has historias et plures hanc materiam concernentes recitat beatus Ieronimus contra Iouinianum in primo suo libro capitulo 39°." ("Blessed Jerome recite each of these stories and more concerning this material in contra Jovinianum, in the first book, chapter 39.") As Manly and Rickert explain, this gloss appears on line 1462, the end of Dorigen's Complaint, in Elsmere and Additional 35286, but earlier in the Complaint in other manuscripts. In some manuscripts, it appears immediately after the first exemplum; in others, after the initial list of unmarried suicides. According to Manly and, this suggests that the Complaint may

²⁶³ Translations of Jerome are from Ralph Hanna III and Traugott Lawler, eds., *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, Vol. 1 (Athens, GA, 1997), with my adjustments to reflect the portions of the text quoted in the *Franklin's Tale* glosses.

have once ended earlier, an observation that further underscores the passage's self-perpetuating form.²⁶⁴

These glosses represent Chaucer's composition of the Complaint as a negotiation between the literary past and his own present moment. Critics including Warren Ginsberg and Robert R. Edwards have explored the role of cross cultural translation in *The Franklin's Tale* as a whole, describing how Chaucer's adjusts Menedon's Question to suit his own social and literary environment.²⁶⁵ But we might also think of the "now" of Chaucer's *Tale* in formal and rhetorical terms, as a moment similar to the "tyme" in which Aurelius decides to speak. The most obvious negotiation between Jerome's old text and Chaucer's new one is formal. In order to suit *The Franklin's Tale*, the Complaint must be translated from Latin prose into Middle English couplets. And the demands of rhyme have significance for the way that Jerome's text—and the history it describes—is interpreted in the *Tale*. Thus for example, Chaucer's version of the story of Phidon's daughters reads,

Whan thritty tirauntz, ful of cursednesse,
Hadde slayn Phidon in Atthenes atte feste,
They commanded his doghtres for t'arestre
And bryngen hem biforn hem in despit,
Al naked, to fulfille hir foul delit,
And in hir fadres blood they made hem daunce
Upon the pavement, God yeve hem meschaunce!
For whiche these woful maydens, ful of drede,
Rather than they wolde lese hir maydenhede,

²⁶⁴ Manly and Rickert, *The Text*, 513.

²⁶⁵ See Warren Ginsberg, "'Gli scogli neri e il niente che c'è': Dorigen's Black Rocks and Chaucer's Translation of Italy" in Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior, eds., *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning* (Notre Dame, IN, 2005) and Robert R. Edwards, *Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* (New York, 2002).

They prively been stirt into a welle
And dreynte hemselven, as the books telle.
(V.1368-78)

Among the additions to Jerome that help Chaucer rhyme the account are “despit” and “foul delit,” along with the added expostulation, “God yeve hem meschaunce.” In comparison to Jerome, Chaucer’s poetry accosts the Thirty Tyrants from a position of righteous indignation. Are these changes motivated by Chaucer’s ethical and political approach to the material, by Dorigen’s perspective, or by the demands of rhyme? One effect of seeing the English alongside the Latin is to suggest that rhyme is one among many principles of selectivity and bias that shape Chaucer’s version of the story. Placed alongside Chaucer’s poetry, the story of Phidon’s daughters takes on the appearance of straightforward, objective historical material. Chaucer molds his source into form, changing its meaning as he does so. Meanwhile, the gloss encouraging the reader to consult Jerome for these stories and others serves as a reminder that, despite the Complaint’s prolific length, Chaucer creates his poetry via principles of exclusion. In creating Dorigen’s lament, he selects material according to the needs of the moment. By contrast, Jerome’s compendious Latin prose text appears divorced from a particular rhetorical situation.

Does vernacular poetry therefore respond to certain kinds of formal restriction that prose evades? A more nuanced account of the relationship between Chaucer’s poetry and the *Adversus Jovinianum* emerges in Elsmere and Add. 35286. Both of these manuscripts include extensive glossing on Dorigen’s Complaint, giving material from Jerome alongside each of the passage’s exempla. I do not hope in this chapter to make an

argument for the direct Chaucerian origin of all of these glosses, although Linne Mooney's recent research into the identity of Adam Pinkhurt draws close connections between the Elsmere scribe and Chaucer.²⁶⁶ However, by considering the implications of the Elsmere and Add. 35286 glosses, we might open up broader understandings of what Chaucer's poetry can do for its readers. These glosses typically include incipits, keying the reader in to a specific site in Jerome's text. Thus for example next to Chaucer's account of Lucretia, the gloss reads, "primo ponam lucreciam que violate pudicie nolens superuiuere maculam corporis cruore deleuit" ("I put Lucrece first, who, not wishing to outlive her violated chastity, removed the spot from her body with her own blood.")

Alongside the description of Niceratus's wife is the gloss, "Quid loquar Nicerati coniugem pie impaciens iniurie viri mortem et cetera" ("What should I have to tell of Niceratus's wife?"). These glosses carry remainders of Jerome's own argument, preserving his rhetorical language (such as the *occupatio* of "quid loquar") as a finding aid. This language serves as a reminder that the *Adversus Iovinianum*, like Chaucer's poetry, arranges *exempla* according to specific rhetorical and formal demands. Lucretia, for example, is placed first among virtuous Roman wives in Jerome's text. The more extensive glossing in Elsmere and Add. 35286 thus shifts the dynamic between Chaucer and Jerome. Instead of suggesting that Chaucer is bringing an atemporal compendium of material into a particular rhetorical and poetic moment, these manuscripts reveal a negotiation between two different rhetorical situations.

²⁶⁶ Linne R. Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe," *Speculum* 81 (2006): 97-138.

Not all of Jerome's rhetorical language is carried into *The Franklin's Tale* itself, but some of it is. Like Jerome, Dorigen begins her story of Niceratus's wife with *occupatio*: "What shal I seye of Nicerates wyf, that for swich cas birafted hirself hir lyf?" (V.1437-38). Similarly, when Chaucer transitions from "the Theban mayden that for Nichanore / hirselven slow" to "Another Theban mayden," he borrows the transition from Jerome, who transitions from the women in love with Nichanore to "aliam Thenanam virginem" (V.1432, 1434). These moments of rhetorical cross-pollination are significant because they reveal that there is more behind Dorigen's complaint than a single, abstract, formal logic. There is also more to it than a transition between two distinct, fully separated rhetorical, formal, and cultural moments. Instead, the glossed version of the Complaint shows that Chaucer's transformation of Jerome's text relies at once on an abstract, formalized version of temporality, and on opportunistic, contingent points of contact between Chaucer's poetry and Jerome's prose. Chaucer, like Ovid, writes in the context of constant change. But in its glossed version, Dorigen's Complaint brings out the unpredictability, materiality, and contingency driving these changes.

This layered, palimpsestic approach to literary form matters because it reveals that form, like time, is not something that we can necessarily view from a comprehensive perspective.²⁶⁷ Describing the Complaint according to a single literary category (such as a catalogue, a formal complaint, or rhymed couplets) does not sufficiently describe its

²⁶⁷ For a reading that implicitly approaches *The Franklin's Tale* form as an asynchronous combination of different literary elements, see John Finlayson, "Invention and Disjunction: Chaucer's Rewriting of Boccaccio in *The Franklin's Tale*," *English Studies* 89 (2008): 385-402. Finlayson suggests that the *Tale* implants individualized, emotive characters within a narrative not designed to accommodate them.

form.²⁶⁸ Neither does assigning it to a specific historical or rhetorical situation. In other words, efforts (like those of Aurelius) to know the social, cultural, and rhetorical moment of poetry can only explain its form in part. Similarly, efforts (like those of Dorigen) to know the structure of time—or at least, to control the passage of time through language—also fall short of accounting for the uncanny, seemingly happenstance survival of old forms within new poetry. Like the black rocks off the coast of Brittany, poetic form simultaneously demands an explication and resists one. It may be precisely in poetry's relationship to contingency, the inexplicable, the anachronistic, and the unnecessary—not in its regularity and its predictability—that literary form can intimate a sense of providence.

²⁶⁸ Although I have here focused on problem of accounting for Dorigen's Complaint, there are problems with describing the form of the entire *Tale* as well. The Franklin introduces it as a Middle English lay, a category whose very existence relies on limited evidence. Chaucer may have derived his notion of this genre from the Auchinleck Manuscript alone. Cf. Laura Hibbard Loomis, "Chaucer and the Breton Lays of the Auchinleck Manuscript," in *Adventures in the Middle Ages* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1962), 111-130. See also John Finlayson, "The Form of the Middle English 'Lay,'" *Chaucer Review* 19.4 (1985): 352-368.

APPENDIX

Chapter Two Images

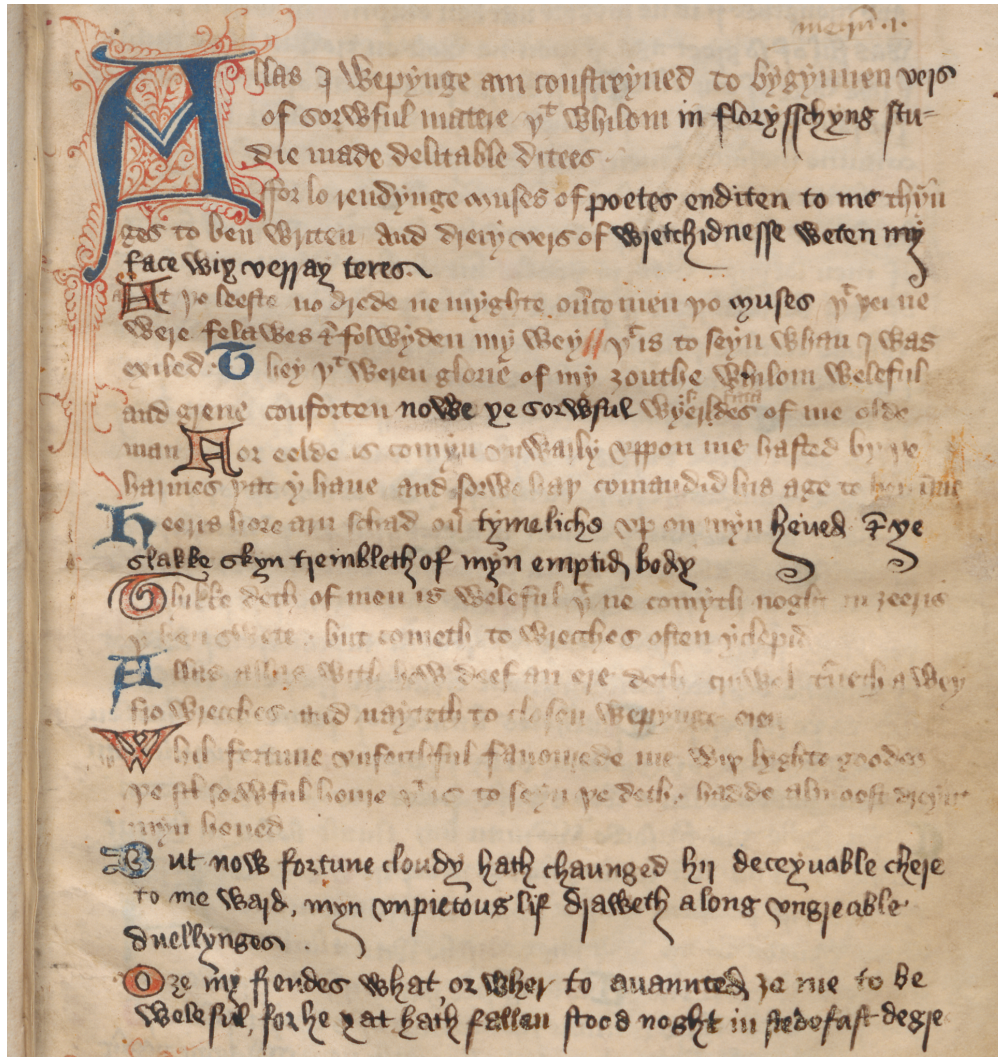


Figure 1: Cambridge University Library MS CUL li.1.38 f.1r.

multa bagnarono le loro piante. Almeno queste s'io nostre
 gongole nulla paura pot. Vinto
 chi seguitasse la nostra via. **I**
 L'agione del bene avventurata i qua die
 tre gio. tando uede. Consola ora
 leature ome diente uocchio.
 P che la non pensata uocchio.
 Et lo dolore uocchio adeste la
 sua etade. Donchi tempo si far

Figure 2: Detail from Biblioteca Medicea
 Laurenziana MS Pl. 23 dext. 11, f. 4r.

no l'abbate diuen piante &
 Almeno queste piante no
 pre compagne nulla pau
 ra pot.
 V incate ch'non seguitasse la
 nostra via.
 L'agione del bene avventurata
 inga adietro diuentudine
 verde.
 Consola ora leature ome
 diente uocchio.
 P che la non pensata uocchio.
 Et lo dolore uocchio adeste la
 sua etade.

Figure 3: Detail from Biblioteca Riccardiana MS
 1003 f. 84v.



Figure 4: Detail from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Reginensis Latino 1971 f. 1r.

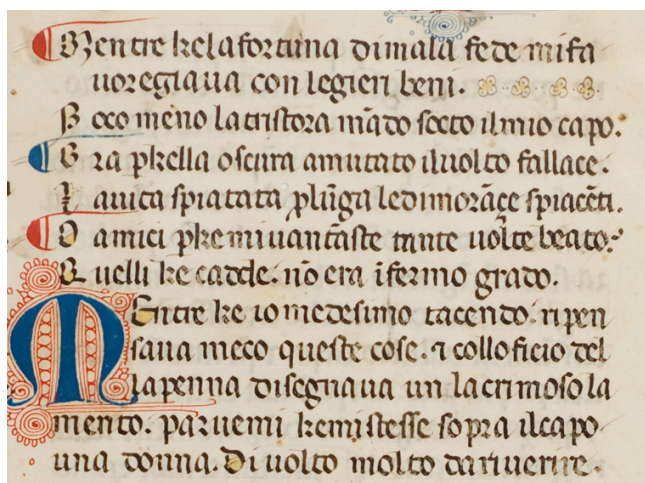


Figure 5: Detail from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Reginensis Latino 1971 f. 4r